

Poet Lore Plays

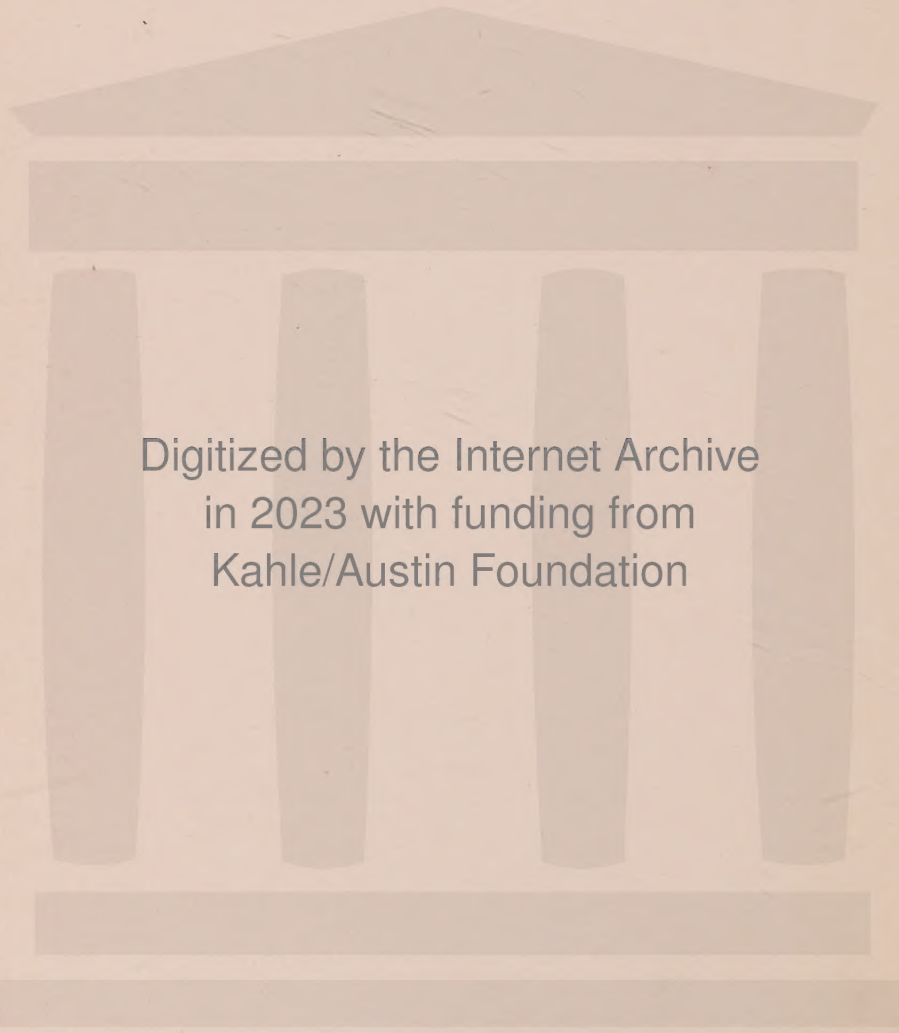
KING HUNGER

LEONID ANDREYEV

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KING-HUNGER

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PROLOGUE

KING-HUNGER *in the face of* TIME and DEATH

Night. The summits of an ancient cathedral belfry. Behind is the urban evening sky, sharply tinged below with the glow of the city street lights, which gradually higher up grows murky, leaden, passing into a black, overhanging, heavy gloom. On its background, where the sky is bright, sharply, and distinctly stand out the black posts, rafters, bells, and rails of the church tower, as if cut out of black pasteboard. Downward the tower passes into black, peaked, fantastic silhouettes of chapel roofs; chimneys, like motionless human figures listening and musing on something; statues gazing down. Only here and there over this black lace glimmer faint reflections of the street lights; dimly shine the steep sides of the bell, the rounded corners of the columns seem yellow; a faint light illumines the face, breast, and wing-tops on the statue of an angel darting down with outstretched arms.

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KING-HUNGER, DEATH, and old TIME BELL-RINGER are seen on the platform of the belfry.

DEATH is perfectly motionless, facing this way, and his dark form shows a small, round head on a long neck, rather broad and angular shoulders, regular and rigid features. He is wrapped in a full black, half-transparent cloak, closely enveloping him; through its texture is felt and almost discernible a skeleton. Old TIME is quite as motionless, only shaking his head now and then. His immense head is covered with long, shaggy, gray beard and hair; the profile discloses a huge, austere nose and thick, beetling brows.

KING-HUNGER moves about anxiously and passionately, so that it is difficult to form a clear conception of his figure. But it is apparent that he is tall and flexible.

Conversation of TIME BELL-RINGER, KING-HUNGER, and DEATH.

Time.— You will deceive again, King-Hunger. You have many a time already deluded your poor children and me.

King-Hunger.— Believe, old man.

Time.— How can I believe an impostor?

King-Hunger.— Trust me once more. Trust me only once more, old man. I never lied. I mocked myself. A miserable king on a shattered throne, I gulled myself. You know well how cunning, how false, how evasive man is. And I killed my poor children, and fed Death upon their gaunt bodies. (*He points his finger on DEATH. Still motionless DEATH interrupts him in a squeaking, harsh, and very calm voice, like the screeching of the old, rusted, time-worn gateway in the calm of night.*)

Death.— Yes,— but I am not full.

Time.— You are never full. So many you have devoured before my very eyes, yet you're lean and ravenous as before.

King-Hunger.— But now I'll provide him more nutritive food. He has gnawed enough of bones as a house dog on chain,— let him now in lewd enjoyment delight in healthy, plump, fat bodies, whose blood is so red and rich and smacky. Your hand, Death! You'll thank me,— in your honor there will be a feast!

Death (*withholding his hand and speaking in the same squeaking voice*).— Yes — but I am never grateful.

Time.— You lie, King-Hunger!

King-Hunger.— Look at my face — is it not dreadful? Gaze into my eyes, in the darkness you'll perceive the glow of the bloody revolt in them. Time is nigh, old man! The earth is hungry. She is replete with moans. She raves with revolt. Strike the bell, old man, rend to the ears its copper mouth! Let no one slumber.

Time (*hesitatingly*).— True! At nightfall, when time is wrapped

in silence, thence — from below — rise faint moans. Weeping of children.

King-Hunger (stretches his hand toward the city).— It is from there, from the cursed city.

Time (shaking his head).— No, still farther. Wailing of women, the death-rattle of the aged, howling of hungry dogs.

King-Hunger.— It is from there — from the fields, out of the depth of the famine-wasted, perishing villages!

Time.— No, still farther, farther yet. As if I hear the groans of the whole earth, and they let me not rest. I am old, I am weary, I need repose, but they let me not sleep. Would I could die. Death, my dear old friend, oh, when will you take me away? (*DEATH remains silent, and old TIME mournfully droops his head.*)

King-Hunger.— Strike the bell! I am also wretched. Would I too could die. Oh, my miserable children, I strove to create a kingdom of mighty ones, but only created a kingdom of cut-throats, dullards, impostors. I am no king, I am a contemptible fawner, and my crown, my majestic, blood-stained crown is a plaything for their children. Kill them, O Time, strike the bell! Strike!

Time.— You had spoken thus once in days gone by,—and deceived.

King-Hunger.— I doubted then myself.

Time.— But now?

King-Hunger.— Look at my children! Ask Death, he never lies. Hitherto resigned, now they resent him with storms of indignation, curses, rage!

Death (speaking in the same calm, harsh voice).— Yes — they brawl somewhat.

King-Hunger.— Your hand, Death! (*Death remains immobile and taciturn. Silence. Slowly and sadly the clock strikes in the dark tower.*)

Time (hesitatingly).— I begin to believe. I crave to rest — to die.

King-Hunger.— Then there will be no Time! O precious bell, you will bring us peace and rest! Let me gently lay my weary head on thee. (*He caresses the bell fondly, kissing its steep sides. Then silently he feigns to ring it; and quietly watching him, DEATH grins a dry, short laugh.*)

Time.— You laugh, Death?

Death.— Yes, a little.

Time.— Are you glad? Or do you sneer at my confidence? But there is truth in his words, and the bell knows it. At midnight, when all nature sleeps and only the exhausted earth is moaning, a soft rustle, faint and shadowy sounds traverse its sides. As though thousands of invisible hands feel it and caress and inquire: Is the sound of the copper still preserved?

It is dreadful in the belfry on nights, when the city glimmers below with slakeless fires and the earth groans in a nightmare. You hear? (*All listen intently. KING-HUNGER falls back from the bell and listens, his arms outstretched. In a sonorous whisper the bell softly sighs and is hushed.*)

Death.— Yes — it rings a little.

King-Hunger.— Do you hear! The earth clamors for revolt. Haste, old man!

Time.— And so every night. How distressing to hear it.

King-Hunger.— You will soon hear other voices. In them will be rage!

Time.— And pain.

King-Hunger.— No, rage, rage! The earth has always enough of pain. Rage, rage, old man! (*Somewhere below, in the gleaming depth, a long and raucous trumpet is blaring three times. Low at first, the sound gradually faints away on a high note — a dismal and dreadful cry rings in it. And once more, somewhere in the invisible distance, resounds the trumpet, lingering and dismal.*)

Death.— They call me. (*He disappears. Silence reigns for a while. The invisible lights of the city grow dim, wither, and high on one side a reddening begins to play and toss noiselessly in the sky. Evidently a fire has broken out somewhere in the city.*)

Time.— Death is gone.

King-Hunger.— He was called.

Time.— Oh, tell me, why did he kill my pigeon? Here on the roof lived the pigeon, rapped the latten with his claws and cheered me, and he killed him. (*KING-HUNGER boisterously laughs.*)

Time.— Why, what's now?

King-Hunger.— Nothing. I love him dearly.

Time.— Now you laugh, and again I doubt you. Here we are alone — tell me the truth, King-Hunger. You are a great betrayer; you delude, you incite people to furious deeds and then you sneer at them. But now?

King-Hunger (solemnly and firmly).— I vow.

Time.— You'll give victory to the starving?

King-Hunger.— I vow.

Time.— And you'll let me rest?

King-Hunger.— I vow.

Time (sighing).— I believe you. I will strike the bell when you desire it.

King-Hunger.— It will be ere long. I am spent with fatigue.

Time.— I too am tired. (*Wearily he lays his immense shaggy head on the stone balustrade. The deepening red paints with a glare his gray hair and*

long, meager arm resting on the rail. KING-HUNGER wearily sits down at his feet and rests his head against his knees. *He speaks:*

King-Hunger.— There's a fire again. But I am weary. I won't go there to-night. I will stay with you. Here 'tis peaceful.

Time.— 'Tis awful here.

King-Hunger.— 'Tis more awful there. I have been everywhere, but with men it is most terrible. Sing me thy lay, O Time, give peace to the great and miserable King. (*In the glow of the advancing fire TIME sings in a low, aged voice.*)

(*The Song of Time.*)

Once lived a pigeon in the tower — a pigeon. He rapped his claws on the latten — a pigeon, a pigeon. Death came and killed my pigeon. All perishes, all decays, all is born again. O Eternity, my mother dear! O seconds, minutes, years, my children dear! O Infinity, my daughter dear! (*Half the sky is already blazing red, and now the fire does not advance softly tossing, but by flits and leaps. Peace and repose is in the tower; and mournfully, with submission, rings out the clock, invisibly marking fleeting time.*)

(*Curtain.*)

FIRST SCENE

(KING-HUNGER calls upon the *Workingmen* to revolt)

The first impression that forcibly seizes upon a chance spectator is that of the many-throated, complex, yet rhythmical noises of the operating machines, and of the thousands of men appendant to them. The uniform, heavy gasping of steam engines; the humming and hissing of flying wheels; the whirring of the endless belts; the dull, infrequent, and earth-quivering blows of the massive, mechanical drop hammers. On the background of these dead, ponderous, cruelly invariable sounds, as if independent of man's volition — a sprightly, volatile, but rhythmical clattering of the many small hammers. Varying in tone and intensity of sound, they now blend into a common, swift, garrulous torrent, then they disperse, pine away, grow wailful and meek, as a flock of singing birds in a forest scared away by a kite. In general, a definite melody is produced, like that of Time's song.

At the rise of the curtain the stage represents the interior of the factory in black and red. The red, the fiery — these are the lights of the furnaces, the incandescent bars of iron over which (diffusing sparks), hammer dark shadows of men. The black, the shapeless, like descending gloom — these are the silhouettes of the monstrous machines, whimsical structures assuming the menacing aspect of a nightmare. Sternly impassive they press with all their might

and crush the men with their colossal weight. The pillars supporting them bear resemblance to the paws of monstrous beasts; and their black, formidable masses — to carcasses of animals, to gigantic birds of prey with outspread wings, amphibious, chimerical. Weight and quietude and gloom and it seems as if from every corner gloat wide-open, fixed, blind eyes.

And as small black shadows swarm the men below. Eagerness is absent in their movements; there is no ardent, impetuous freedom of gesture. Regularly and automatically they talk and move, in measure with the hammers and working machines; and when some one juts out of the mass, he seems as a piece chipped off the gloomy machine, the odd structure appearing like some obscure monstrosity.

The clatter of the operating hammers and machines now augments, then abates. And the voices of the men imperceptibly stream into their chorus and sound in unison, now quick and sonorous, then dull, brief, torpid, almost dead.

(Complaints of the Workingmen)

— We are starving.

— We are starving.

— We are starving. (*Thrice precipitously strikes the massive drop hammer.*)

— We are crushed by machines.

— Their weight smothers us.

— The iron crushes.

— The steel oppresses.

— Oh, what a furious weight! As a mountain upon me!

— The whole earth is upon me.

— Oh, what a furious weight! (*The drop hammer strikes.*)

— The iron hammer flattens me. It crushes the blood out of my veins, it fractures my bones, it makes me flat as sheet iron.

— Through the rollers my body is pressed and drawn thin as a wire. Where is my body? Where is my blood? Where is my soul?

— The wheel is twirling me.

— Day and night screams the saw cutting steel. Day and night in my ears the screeching of the saw cutting steel. All the dreams that I see, all the sounds and songs that I hear, is the screeching of the saw cutting steel. What is the earth? It is the screeching of the saw. What is the sky? It is the screeching of the saw cutting steel. Day and night.

— Day and night.

— Day and night.

(*Thrice strikes the drop hammer.*)

— We are crushed by the machines.

A Shrill Voice.— We ourselves are parts of the machines.

- I am the hammer.
- I am the flapping belt.
- I am the lever.

A Weak Voice.— I am a small cap screw, my head is cut in two. I am screwed in tight. And I keep silent. But I quiver with the general commotion, and an eternal drone is in my ears.

— I am a small piece of coal. I am cast into the furnace and I give off light and heat. And again I am cast, and again I burn with a slakeless glow.

- We are the fire. We are the glowing furnaces.
- No. We are the food for the fire.
- We are the machines.
- No. We are the food for the machines.
- It is terrible.

— It is terrible. (*The drop hammer strikes. The voices ring rueful and dismayed.*)

- O dreadful machines!
 - O powerful machines!
 - Let us pray! Let us pray to the machines!
- (*Hymn to the Machine.*)

Who is all-powerful in the world? Who is most dreadful in the world? The machine. Who is most fair, most wealthy, and all-wise? The machine. What is the earth? A machine. What is the sky? A machine. What is man? A machine. A machine.

(*Thrice in stern assent strikes the drop hammer.*)

☞ Thou, Lord of the universe; thou, master of our bodies, thoughts, and ideas; thou, glorious, immortal, all-wise machine — have mercy! Kill not — mangle not — torture us not so terribly! Thou, most inexorable of the ruthless, forged from iron, breathing fire, give us even a little freedom! Through thy smoke-blackened windows, through the smoke of thy chimneys we do not see the sky, we do not see the sun! Have mercy! (*For a moment the quick, small hammers are allayed, and three times fall in the dark the dead blows of the drop hammer, dull and relentless. And already are heard single voices aroused:*)

- She hears us not!
- She is deaf — devil!
- She gulls!
- She mocks us!
- We toil for others!
- Everything for others!
- We cast machine-guns.

- We forge the clanging iron.
- We make gunpowder.
- Build the mills.
- Cities.
- Everything for others.
- Brothers! We forge our own chains! (*Accelerated, quick, piercing, indignant rattling of the quick, small hammers. And in measure with the hammers are heard exasperated voices:*)
 - Every blow is a new link.
 - Every blow is a new rivet.
 - Strike the iron!
 - Forge your own chains!
- O brothers, O brothers, we forge our own chains! (*The dead blow of the drop hammer breaks upon this swift boisterous torrent, that staying which then continues smooth and weary.*)
 - Who will deliver us from the clutch of the machine?
 - Will heaven help us? Will the sun show?
 - King-Hunger!
 - King-Hunger!
 - No, he is our enemy. He drove us hither.
 - But he will also lead us hence.
 - Great is his power! Majestic his might!
 - He is dreadful! He is crafty and false. He is malignant. He slays our children. Our mothers have no milk. Their breasts are shrunken.
 - He stands over our homes as a horrible specter.
 - Nowhere can we escape him. He is over the whole earth.
 - Jailer!
 - Cut-throat!
 - King-Hunger! King-Hunger! (*The drop hammer strikes.*)
 - No, he is our friend. He loves us and weeps for us.
 - Scold him not. He is unfortunate. And he promises us liberty.
 - That's true. He gives us power.
 - That's true. What cannot the starving do?
 - That's true. Whose rage is fiercer?
 - Whose courage is more despairing? What can the starving fear?
 - Nothing!
 - Nothing! Nothing! (*Several blows of the drop hammer.*)
 - Call him hither!
 - Hunger! Hunger! Hunger!
 - Come here to us. We are starving. We are starving!
 - Hush, madmen!

- Hunger! Hunger!
- He comes!
- King-Hunger! King-Hunger!
- He is come!
- King-Hunger!

(From out of the furnace, to the center, into the streak of purple light, swiftly enters KING-HUNGER. He is tall, lank, and flexible; his face, with immense, black passionate eyes, is bony and wan; the hair on his peaked skull is cut low. He is naked to his waist and his strong, sinewy trunk is clearly delineated in the red light. He produces an impression as something narrow, pinched, towering upwards. He is impetuous and bold in movement; sometimes, when musing and grieving, he is royally deliberative and majestic. But when he is flushed with wrath, or when he invokes, or curses, — he appears like a rapidly twining spiral shooting its sharp end upwards to the sky. Then, as a whirlwind twirling dry leaves, he seems as if catching up everything about him from the ground in his motion, and in one short sweep hurling it up skyward. His voice is noble and sonorous; and profoundly tender are his manners toward his ill-starred children.

King-Hunger.—My children! Oh, my dear children! I heeded your moans and came. Quit your work! Come near me. Quit your work! (He stands expectant, illumed by the red light of the blazing furnace. Slowly the toilers gather about him. Only three of them step into the stream of light and are clearly perceptible, the rest stand in a mass of obscure shadows; only here and there a fortuituous ray snatches out of the gloom a naked muscular shoulder, a raised hammer, or a stern profile. The three in the foreground are such in their appearance:

THE FIRST WORKINGMAN by his powerful figure and expression of extreme lassitude resembles Herakles of Farnese. The breadth of his uncovered shoulders, the iron rods of muscles gathered on his arms and breast speak of superfluous incomparable strength, that already crushes and oppresses its owner. On his huge trunk — a small, weakly developed head with a low forehead and dim, servile eyes; and from the manner in which it bends forward there is felt a heavy and painful, bullish stupidity. Both his hands wearily recline on the helve of a massive hammer.

THE SECOND WORKINGMAN is young, but already wasted, already ill, already coughing. He is daring and timid; proud and modest to bashfulness and stammering. He would commence to speak, impassioned, imaginative, dreaming — and then suddenly abashed he would innocently smile. He adheres airily to the earth, as if wings were somewhere on his back; and coughing up blood, he smiles and gazes heavenward.

THE THIRD WORKINGMAN is rapid, a blanched old man, as if long, all his

life, he were drenched in corroding solutions. His voice is also colorless; and when he talks, it seems that millions of wan, colorless beings, almost shadows, are whispering. (*The din of the quick, small hammers abates.*)

King-Hunger (*he speaks imperatively*).—Hearken, my dear children! I wandered over the whole kingdom of toil, the realm of hunger and poverty, injustice and perdition — my whole vast and miserable kingdom. Who has ever seen King-Hunger crying? But I did cry, O my children. I shed bitter tears, beholding the distress of your brothers. Woe, woe, unto the toilers!

Workingmen (*echoing quietly*).—Woe! Woe! Woe unto the toilers!

King-Hunger.—And I brought you greetings from your brothers. I brought you a great behest from your brothers; make ready to revolt! (*Silence. The bell strikes.*)

—Make ready to revolt. Invisibly its bloody banner already floats in the air, and on nights groans the Bell of Alarm trembling with the agonies of the earth. I heard his groans!

(*Silence.*)

First Workingman (*he lays his ponderous hand on the King's shoulder, who stoops under its pressure, and speaks in a dull, powerful voice, as if coming out of some vaulted depth*).—I am a workingman. I am as old as the earth. I have performed all the twelve labors, cleansed stables, cut off the hydra's heads, dug and vexed the earth, built cities, and have so altered its face, that the Creator himself would not readily recognize her. But I can't say why I did all this. Whose will did I shape? To what end did I aspire? My head is dull. I am dead tired. My strength oppresses me. Explain it to me, O King! Or I'll clutch this hammer and crack the earth as a hollow nut. (*Threateningly he raises his hammer.*)

King-Hunger.—Patience, my son! Save your powers for the last great revolt. Then you'll know all.

First Workingman (*surlily and obediently*).—I shall wait.

Second Workingman (*he comes up to KING-HUNGER and speaks in excitement, pointing to the first*).—He cannot comprehend it, O King. He thinks that we must crack the earth. It is a gross falsehood, O King! The earth is fair as the garden of God. We must guard and caress her as a little girl. Many that stand there in the darkness say, there is no sky, no sun, as if eternal night is upon the earth. Just think: eternal night! (*He coughs.*)

King-Hunger.—Why, coughing blood, do you smile and gaze to heaven?

Second Workingman.—Because flowers will blossom on my blood, and I see them now. On the breast of a beautiful rich lady I saw a red rose — she didn't know it was my blood.

King-Hunger (sneeringly).— You are a poet, my son. I suppose you write verses, as they do.

Second Workingman.— King, O King, sneer not at me. In darkness I learned to worship fire. Dying I understood that life is enchanting. Oh, how enchanting! King, it shall become a great garden, and there shall walk in peace, unmolested, men and animals. Dare not ruffle the animals! Wrong not any man! Let them play, embrace, caress one another — let them! (*Mournfully.*) But where is the path? Where is the path? Explain, King-Hunger.

King-Hunger (firmly and gloomily).— Revolt.

Second Workingman (dejected).— Through violence to freedom? Through blood to love and kisses?

King-Hunger.— There's no other way. (*Silence. Deep sighing.*)

Third Workingman (he comes up and speaks in his colorless voice).— You lie, King-Hunger. Then you have killed my father and grandfather and great-grandfather, and would'st thou kill us? Where do you lead us, unarmed? Don't you see how ignorant we are, how blind and impotent. You are a traitor. Only here you are a king, but there you lackey upon their tables. Only here you wear a crown, but there you walk about with a napkin.

King-Hunger (shouting with rage).— Shut up. You have lost your senses.

Resolute Voices.— No.

— Let him speak.

— Go ahead, old man.

— You, King, listen.

King-Hunger (meekly apologizing).— Pardon me, my children. Certainly, let him speak. Speak, old man, fear not.

— I am not afraid. I am only a screw of the machine, I fear nothing. But why do you deceive us? Why do you inspire us with fallacious faith in victory? Have, then, the starvelings ever conquered?

King-Hunger.— Yes — but now they will conquer.

Voices.— It must be ended.

— We cannot live thus.

— 'Tis better far to die.

— There's no other way.

First Workingman.— Or I shall lift my hammer.

Second Workingman.— Suppose there is another way?

— Which?

— Speak, which?

— He is raving! (*They crowd about KING-HUNGER and the First Workingman.*)

Second Workingman (dreamily).— Suppose — to try — inflame with dreams the earth? (*Laughter. He speaks in a fever of agitation and hurry.*) Just wait. There's another King, not King-Hunger. (*Startled.*) But I don't know his name. (*Laughter.*)

King-Hunger (condescendingly).— You are a poet, my son. Poets have never inflamed the earth. Only the mighty, the great, the omnipotent King-Hunger can inflame her! Harken unto me, my children. (*With head sunk low, he speaks gruffly and vehemently.*) Your old man here called me a lackey. I lost my temper; it is hard to bear an insult thus hurled—but 'tis true. Yes, I am a lackey. I fawn upon the rich. I am a mercenary murderer, their henchman, executing only the innocent. O crafty, vile man, what hast thou made of me? To what disgrace hast thou reduced my exalted, first-created throne! (*Speaking in a kind and endearing voice.*) O children, O my dear children, behold the forest, gaze into the depth of rivers, seas, and bogs, where my rule is still infinite — how beautiful it is there! All's moving, all's growing, arraying itself in strength and color, aspiring to become a rainbow, a divinity — how beautiful it is there! And there are many corpses, but not murdered, not innocently executed — for I am King of Righteousness in my great kingdom! (*Flushed with wrath.*) But here? O crafty, vile man! Depraved, gluttoned, he sits, slothful drone, and chases me the world over as a rabid but servile dog. King-Hunger, there! King-Hunger, here! Slay those! Enfeeble these! Extirpate the children and the women! Destroy the beauty and the might of the fair body and let over all reign me, full bellied, vile, flabby. I have no desire to eat, but gorge my gullet with that mutton leg, cram it into my fat belly. And I cram, cram, and wipe with a napkin his greasy lips. (*An outburst of laughter echoed angrily by KING-HUNGER. He continues.*) How darest thou to pervert my will, O crafty, vile man! Ye, starving, with me against the gluttons! Let us give back to man his might and beauty; let us fling him again into the torrent of infinite motion! With me, ye starving! (*He whirls round in the center.*) Who says you are weak? You are the salt of the earth. Are you then weak? (*In confusion he seizes by the shoulder the old man who feebly totters.*) Yes, I erred. You're frail. But you, you, my friend? (*He grasps the hands of the FIRST WORKINGMAN, admiring him.*) Isn't this might? Isn't this beauty? Look at him. These muscles, that chest. My dear son, you are worthy of kingship, but you are only a slave. Give me your hand and I will kiss it. (*Impetuously he falls upon his knees and kisses the heavy, flaccid hand.*)

First Workingman.— I understand nothing.

Voices.— They have arms.

— They possess the guns we have cast.

— They have the engineers.

— The learned.

— They have authority and power and brains. (KING-HUNGER *listens intently with outstretched neck.*)

— The machines are theirs!

— Terrible machines!

— Wise machines!

King-Hunger (stamping his foot he screams in wrath).— Then destroy them! I hate machines! They lie, they deceive, they enthrall you. Break them!

— They have machine-guns.

— Seize them!

First Workingman.— But who shall rule? We cannot, King!

King-Hunger (frenzied with rage, he suddenly shouts imperiously).— Shut up! (*When all is stilled, he speaks with violent effort, between his teeth, hardly restraining his turbulent wrath.*) Madmen! They need guns, not you. Take only them away, then powerless and humble, like domesticated animals, they will cry, imploring your mercy.

Voices.— That's true!

— Take away the guns, then the engineers and the learned will enter your employ, and you'll be the masters of the earth!

— That's true.

— No, 'tis false. Brothers, here's fresh treachery!

— No, 'tis the truth!

King-Hunger.— Revolt, my children! Into the streets! Demolish the machines, cut the belts, quench the boilers—into the streets! Revolt, my children! The great and miserable King calls on you!

Voices.— Into the streets!

— We are afraid!

— They'll kill us!

— Into the streets!

— We cannot endure it longer. Down with the cowards!

— Dash the machines!

— We are afraid!

— Afraid!

— Have pity, King-Hunger. We are so afraid!

King-Hunger (with a commanding movement of his hand he restores silence, and all aglow with the red reflection of the furnace he speaks with cold, despairing ferocity.) You're appalled, my children? Very well. But listen, cowards. Not with a palm of peace have I come to you—but I was sent to murder. You will not stop the machines? Then I'll stop them.

You will not quit work—then I will compel you to. And hence I will be upon your heels. I will break into your quarters — I will strangle your infants — I will drain the last milk from the breasts of your wives and mothers — and slay them. And on their corpses you shall shed bitter tears! (*He shouts ferociously.*) Death! Hither!

(*Amid silence, amid turbid tranquility, thrice blares in the distance the raucous trumpet of DEATH, then nearer and still nearer. The remotest fires, as if stifled by darkness, grow dim; and in the corner, behind the group of workmen, rises something gigantic, shapeless, black.*)

— Is that you, Death.

(*Silence, then a dry, malcontent reply:*)

— Yes, it is I.

(*The WORKINGMEN timidly press close to one another, clearing the corner, where DEATH towers in a black and shapeless blot.*)

King-Hunger.— Have you heard? He is here. He stands over you and waits obediently. One movement, only a signal, and as a dismal black cloud he will rush on your hovels, ruthless, and slay your wives and babes. You know what it means when coffins are carried in a long procession over the gloomy streets — little coffins — tiny coffins — peaceful wooden cradles? (*Stern silence.*)

— Resolve, O cowards, for whom death, for whom perdition? For you or your children? Haste. He waits. (*Silence.*)

First Workingman (resolutely).— For us.

Second Workingman.— For us! For us!

(*Many stern, submissive, enraptured voices.*)

— For us! For us! Take us, O Death, Victory or Death! Death!

(*With shouts they throw themselves at the feet of immobile DEATH. Illumed by the red glow of the furnace, with head clasped between his hands, KING-HUNGER wails loud in frenzied despair and enravishment.*)

Curtain

SECOND SCENE

KING-HUNGER calls upon the Hungry Mob to revolt

Night. A flat, black wall running upwards. On its very top are a few immense plate-glass windows, partly hidden from view; they are brightly lighted — a ball is taking place inside. A hazy motion is perceptible through the semi-transparent curtains and the net of tropical plants. Sometimes a dancing pair sweeps by; then, for a moment, a glimpse of a black evening dress, a gleam of the lady's white attire and her snowy bare shoulders. But for a few intervals the strains of charming, soft, low melodies fill the rooms, and only once for a

brief period is played the *motivo* often heard in the *Ball at the Man's House*. Twice or three times during the scene some handsome figure chances to approach the window and vaguely gazes into the gloom of the street; or a fair, loving young couple would screen themselves in the folds of the draperies to exchange affectionate, transient caresses.

Down the wall, seen in profile, is the underground apartment of the building. The vaulted ceilings are very low, and, as if crushed by the enormous weight of the structure, the apartment has the form of a flattened semi-oval. It somewhat resembles the mouth of a large oven flattened by the pressure of its stones. The room is lighted by a few suspended lamps; in general, the lights here are dimmer than in the Master's upper windows, but sufficiently bright to allow a perfect view of everything within.

In the corners and in the farther end of the apartment lie in disorder a medley of utensils — empty, half-desiccated barrels without hoops, some staves, a wooden box seat, etc., apparently the place is uninhabited. In the middle is a long table, and around it on barrels and boards, in rigorous decorum, are seated the gathered representatives of the hungry mob, and with an air of ominous precision they travesty the present business meeting. There is an inkstand, a small bell, and even a chairman, who sits reeling on an elevated barrel.

In all assembled about twenty persons. They are street-walking strumpets, Hooligans, and their female companions, pimps, petty thieves, cut-throats, paupers, cripples, and other scum of the great city — the most horrible that poverty, vice, crime, and eternal insatiable hunger of the soul can create. Only two or three of them, including a young girl, resemble in face and costume the usual human face and dress; the rest — one continuous, furious, malicious monstrosity, bearing only a remote likeness to man. The almost entire absence of the forehead, the monstrous form of the skull, the large jaws, something either bestial or brutal in gait and movement, make them appear as beings of an altogether singular race. Their dress is fantastic and dirty; only the pimps sport in stupidly flaunting attires, divers-colored cravats, and even assiduously combed and parted hair on their micrencephalous heads. Some faces are obscure; others are very ruddy; there are a few ominous faces, deadly pale, almost white, with bright spots of suffusion on their cheek bones.

The chairman, who is stout and of small stature, with bulging eyes and a peaked bald head, looks like a suffocating, fuddled toad. His face is ruddy.

Chairman (he rings the bell and speaks in a stifled but pacific voice).— All — received — notification?

— Nobody received any.

— Well, just the same, we hold the meeting without notices. So then, Misses harlots and carrions; gentlemen,— hooligans, pickpockets, cut-throats, and pimps,— the meeting will come to order. And in the first

place, as chairman — I ask the honorable members candidly to confess, who brought whiskey along.

— I.

— And I. But you won't get any.

— All have.

Chairman.— Eh — that's wrong. Here it is not permitted to drink, but he who wants to, let him pass to that corner behind the barrel — there's the bar. And, please, do not doze at the table; there's a lady already snoring. There, madam! Mr. Secretary, slap her on the neck!

— Get up, you devil!

— The deuce take them!

— Let's do business.

— Oh, how could we without ladies. They adorn, you know.

— Stop your gab, pimp!

— Thief!

Chairman.— Come, that's very bad. Mr. Thief! Mr. Pimp! Here we are all equal. Well, and ladies too. (*He stares upward in bewilderment and suddenly shouts.*) Hey, music, damn you! 'Tis so noisy.

— To hell with the chairman!

— Why, how?

— He's drunk. He's annoying. Let's do our business! He's tipsy.

— Well, you wrong me. Did I then drink here? I tripped before.

But if all wish me to —

— All! All!

— Well, the plague take you.

(*He retires to the corner and producing a bottle from his pocket he drinks from it. To the chairman's seat, resolutely and alertly, leaps a young Hooligan with a dead pale, bloodless face, and with a twisted black mustache. He is obviously reputed as being very handsome and knows it, for he flirts and shows off much. But in a few moments his graces leave him, and then in the bestial grin of his teeth, the pallid face, and the soft and languid winking of his sharp, small eyes, is felt a ruthless ferocity, a boundless insipidity and nakedness of soul, a total absence of staidness. He speaks somewhat gracefully.*)

— Order, please. I am chairman.

— Who elected you?

— Saucy fellow!

— No, that's all right. He may —

Chairman (grinning furiously).— Shut up! Hold your peace! (*Languidly and gently.*) Some have knives here. Whoever will dispute the election, clamor, cause disorder, I would advise him to visit the priest and make a clear-cut confession.

(Approved laughter.)

— Silence! Hey, put that sot down.

— Here's the bar.

(The former chairman is thrashed and the drunkard seated.)

Drunkard.— Here, now I sit.

Chairman.— Silence! The question for discussion is the present exigency of universal destruction.

— How?

— Of universal destruction. The speakers will please enter their names by turns. Women and drunkards will speak on the chairman's special invitation. Peace! Who wants to speak on the subject?

(A man rises.)

— I would propose to await our father.

Chairman (gloomily).— And your reason?

Speaker.— He called us together here.

— Yes, it is true.

— Let's wait!

Chairman.— Hold your tongue! Speak not from your seats. 'Tis precarious when father comes; we cannot wait. Many have business on hand to-night. I propose to come back to our discussion.

— Pardon me, but the music and the tramping of the dancers there are annoying.

Chairman.— Let them dance. The music is sublime enough to inspire our speakers. What's your wish?

Speaker.— I would like to speak first. To-night my illustrious friend and I have a whole family to slay. You understand, Mr. Chairman, this work requires much time and I ——

— I understand. Proceed.

Speaker (in a mellow voice).— Honorable assembly! I presume not to affirm, my worthy people, since I find myself in a cellar ——

— To the point.

— Very well. When I was born ——

Chairman (angrily).— You were born a blockhead. You're about to slay a family and you begin with your birth, as a member of Parliament.

— But even members of Parliament ——

Chairman.— Please obey. I allot two minutes only for speechmaking. Who has a watch? I left mine home. *(One member produces a dozen watches from his pocket and places them on the table.)*

— Here you are.

Chairman.— Thank you. One is enough. To avoid further dallying,

I recommend to confine ourselves to proposals of methods of destruction, since our motives are indubitable.

— No, not to all. Let them speak.

— What dancing! They'll break down the floor on our heads.

— They are gay.

— Never mind. They soon will cry.

— And we shall dance!

Chairman.— Silence! So, then, I propose two minutes on the motives and two on the methods of destruction. Please begin.

Speaker (with a dark face; he speaks dully).— We are hungry, and as dogs are we thrown out into the dark of night. We were robbed of everything,— strength, health, intellect, beauty.

— Their women are beautiful.

— So are the men.

— Hold your tongues!

Speaker.— We are impudent, blasphemous, perfidious, and have nothing on earth! We are worse than beasts, for once we were men. And I propose (pointing upward) to destroy, to annihilate, to wipe them off the face of the earth. My method is to poison the aqueducts.

— And where should we get so much poison?

— Pillage the drug-stores.

— Glib nonsense! We should perish ourselves.

— We'll drink from the river. And even if we die —

— I wish to die.

— To the deuce with you! Good for nothing! Next!

(*The lingering, raucous trumpet blares thrice nearby, announcing DEATH's advent. However, none hear him.*)

Speaker (a ruddy-faced old man rises).— I perceive that all their power (*pointing upwards*) is in books. When one reads through many books he becomes wise, and then sets about to spoil others, and nothing is to be done. Then he assumes a particular face, speech, and dress, but we are duped, and the very life is pumped out of us. I propose to annihilate their books. I abhor books. When one falls into my hands, I want to thrash it, spit into its face, crush it and cry, rascal! rascal!

— How would you destroy them?

— You're stupid, speaker. They would print others.

— Still more!

— Books are plentiful.

— Enough! Voting afterwards. Next speaker.

Speaker.— I propose —

(*The drunkard, the former chairman, falls off his stool. DEATH enters*

simultaneously and occupies his seat, above the sounds of merry music, and some handsome figure comes up near the window and aimlessly gazes into the darkness of the street. The light admits a view of DEATH'S countenance. His face is small, dry, dismal, with large, dark, yawning sockets and ever-bare, coarse teeth, like the white keys of a piano; very self-composed. The drunkard is searched.

Chairman.—Dead. Lug this carrion into the corner.

(The corpse is rudely hauled away; and there in the corner, humped and sprawling, soles toward the spectators, it lies all the time.)

— Please get to your seats. Who's whining?

— His sweetheart.

— His sweetheart? Miss, and you could have loved that hog? I ask you to be quiet, nevertheless, or I'll order you out. Hush there!

— I won't.

— The speaker will kindly proceed.

Speaker.— I propose, pardon me—there is a park nearby, with beasts and tigers. I propose to break the cages open and free the animals.

— That's foolish. They have guns, palaces,—you will be the first devoured.

Speaker.— Well, at least to scare them.

— Is it indispensable?

Speaker.— So, for fun. And then (*speaking tenderly*) — there in the park their children play, so then, maybe, at least one baby — one child — I should like to see.

— Oh, this — I should enjoy.

— I think 'tis fine.

(The speaker whiningly snivels and begs:)

Speaker.— At least one — little child —

— Certainly! Certainly! Grant the old man's boon.

Chairman (*angrily*).— Silence! Of what use is one, ten, one hundred children to us? Away with effeminacies. Talk business. Propose! Propose!

(Embarrassed, impotent to devise anything, they exchange confounded looks.

Single exclamations:)

— Pound them in the streets!

— What about the police?

— Let's organize into gangs and ——

— We would just hack one another.

— Here! Attention! Listen now! Infect them with our diseases.

— Give them syphilis!

— Typhoid fever!

— Cholera!

Chairman.—Bosh and nonsense! They have doctors. Against one thousand of us — one of them will perish. Think harder! Are we so powerless?

— Damned books!

— What's to be done?

— They dance.

— But where's father?

— We are powerless! Damned! They dance. Where's father?

(All, except unruffled DEATH, spring to their feet and mingling in a mass of infuriated bodies stretch threatening hands to the low, oppressive ceiling.)

— Damned!

— Dance! Dance!

— We shall come to you. Open the doors, we're coming.

— We will strangle your children!

— Damned!

— We will burn your books.

— We will bring you syphilis, typhoid, cholera!

— Damned!

(Despairing and rancorous gnashing of teeth.)

King-Hunger (he enters swiftly).— My children!

(With moans and wails, whining and shrieking, all make a rush to him, encircle him, fall upon their knees grasping his hands. A group is formed with KING-HUNGER towering in the center; and trembling to his feet press close the unfortunates. Only DEATH and the HOOLIGAN-CHAIRMAN remain aside by themselves. With arms folded over breast, the CHAIRMAN looks contemptuously down on the moaning.)

King-Hunger.— Oh, my children! Beloved children of Hunger! My hapless children!

(He coaxes the bowed heads. All are moaning. One draws nearer and, on his knees, begins trembling, stammering, in a lisping, childish voice.)

Boy. — O, father! See what they had done with me! Father! *(He weeps, dries his eyes, and continues.)* Father, look what a pinched forehead is mine. I cannot think, father. Look into my eyes,—are they, then, eyes? Nothing shines in them. They have altogether wasted me. Nothing is left of me, father. I will cry. *(He weeps.)*

— Why does he cry alone? Are we then happier?

— Is he then worse off than we?

— Let's cry! Let's cry!

— Put your hand on my wretched head. I killed a child.

— Caress me, father!

— Oh, pity me!

— We are unfortunate! Forsaken!

(Weeping. Hiding his face in his hands. KING-HUNGER weeps.)

— Poor things! Poor things! *(He says through tears:)*

(All words, moans, and wailing blend into one lingering wail, replete with unendurable, infernal agony; and, as if terrified, the music is charmingly sad and mournful. With arms folded the CHAIRMAN looks contemptuously down upon the wailing.)

— Enough, my children! *(King-Hunger speaks, recovering himself.)*

Chairman.— Yes. I think 'tis enough to whimper. Father, forgive me, but you brought disorder into our meeting. We are busy folks, we have no time.

King-Hunger.— Then proceed with your meeting.

Chairman.— The chairmanship belongs to you now.

— Continue in your state. I'll stay as visitor.

(The flattered CHAIRMAN bows.)

— To your seats! Silence! Who's still weeping? Shut your sluice-gates, or get out!

(Sighing all resume their respective seats.)

King-Hunger *(sitting down near DEATH)*.— And you're here?

Death.— Yes — on an errand.

King-Hunger.— That one there, in the corner?

Death.— Yes — and more's coming.

Chairman *(ringing)*.— The meeting is resumed. Who will speak?

(A little girl rises; her face is thin and pallid, with large, black, mournful eyes. She smooths her dress. A little before her speech, delivered in a very delicate, childish voice, but without confusion, the following takes place above near the illumed window: the draperies are drawn aside and two appear — a young lady with a beautiful, bare neck, on which staidly and lightly rests a pretty pensive head, and in a moment, in the wake of her, an amorous youth. He loves her purely and tenderly, but she? — perhaps she loves, perhaps not. She stands with lowered eyes, charming and noble; suddenly she quickly presses his fingers and then, as the sun, she radiates upon him a brief, bright glance and slips like a serene shadow through the translucent draperies. He puts forth his hands after her, but she is gone; and full of happiness, perhaps tears, he turns a white face to the dark street.)

(And below:)

Chairman.— You, little girl? Can you then speak?

Girl.— Yes, I too wish to say — May I?

King-Hunger *(surprised)*.— Whose child is she?

Girl.— I am not a child. I'm an adulteress. I am now twelve years old, although I look older. When I was ten, mother sold me to a gentle-

man (*pointing upward*) for twenty roubles and a bottle of whiskey. That isn't much, but mother was inexperienced then, as I am her first daughter; the others went down for more. My sister Lizza, that strangled herself——

Chairman.— Speak only about yourself. We have no time.

Girl.— Very well — I only recollected. Since then, for two years now, I've two or three men every night, but they pay little. And my money — isn't it my money? — I give away to my beau that he shouldn't beat me so

(*A burly flaunter with a caroty mustache rises, and hoarsely, with self-complacency, he confirms:*)

— That's I.

Chairman.— Hold your gab! Go ahead, but be brief.

Girl.— Then what more? Oh, yes, I learned to drink; and I am now drunk, but only a little bit. What else? Oh, yes. My heart aches so much. (*She sits down.*)

King-Hunger (*looks upward and speaks quietly between his teeth*).— You hear, damned!

Chairman.— Rise, little girl! What do you propose to do to them?

Girl (*she rises, smoothing down her dress*).— Would they all should die.

King-Hunger (*bending over to DEATH*).— Art thou satisfied?

Death.— Yes — 'tis pleasing to hear.

Chairman.— I am convinced that the girl has expressed a common wish. But to avoid (*flauntingly*) a juridical error I put the question to a vote. Those who would suffer them to live — please rise.

(*All keep their seats. One drunkard struggles to rise, but sits down again when the matter is made intelligible to him.*)

Chairman.— So. Nobody. Those in favor of their death please rise.

(*All rise unanimously, including KING-HUNGER and DEATH.*)

Chairman.— So. Everybody.

Harsh, Morose Voice.— No, not all yet. (*He points to the dead body in the corner, and all eyes turn in that direction.*)

Restrained Grave Voices.— He must also vote.

— The dead must have a vote.

— Lift him up!

— Lift the dead man!

(*Three approach him and amid silence raise the dead man and keep him standing, his head drooping and knees bent under.*)

Harsh Voice.— Now all.

Chairman (*solemnly, with uplifted hands*).— Unanimously condemned to death. Please sit down.

King-Hunger (*whispering to DEATH*).— Listen, you must not rise.

Death.— Get along with you.

Chairman.— But in order not to merit censure afterwards for injustice and in order to comply with all indispensable forms (*stammering*).

King-Hunger (whispering).— Of legal procedure —

Chairman.— Oh, yes, I know — customary forms of legal procedure, I offer to any one here present the opportunity to undertake their defense. Who will? (*Silence. Suspiciously and gloomily they eye one another. Then suddenly a general mirthful outburst of laughter.*)

Voices.— He's a wit.

— Defend them yourself!

— The devil take them.

— Hold! So none here present —

(*A drunken old woman rises.*)

— Now only the children. The children should be spared.

(*A lank, long-haired man, short sighted and delirious looking, springs to his feet.*)

— Look here, spare the children, then spare the women. But the children will grow up, and the women will bear forth new ones. This, auntie, is humanism, which, auntie dear, becomes us not. Kill the children!

— Well, I don't know, as you please. I thought — maybe, you're right. I don't know.

(*A toothless, smooth-shaven person rises. His face and bald head are of a reddish hue, his nose is blue; he talks in a wheedling fashion.*)

— As a former barrister I venture, notwithstanding, to offer such a casus for your consideration. Sometimes during so-called agitations or public calamities one of the members of our illustrious corporation happens to enter into intimate relations with one of those (*pointing upward*) madams or young damsels which results in the birth of a child. Then what does the assembly think of the fruits of similar morganatic marriages? To kill them or leave them to multiply? For the perpetuity of humankind, so to speak?

Chairman.— That isn't to the point.

— Beg pardon, but as a former barrister (*he sits down*).

Chairman.— The question is about means. We have here, father, discussed the question of means and ways, how to destroy. But where's he who had a family to slay?

— He apologized. He's gone.

Chairman.— And so, father, just before your advent we reached a very painful conclusion: we are powerless!

King-Hunger.— You are powerless!

— Yes.

King Hunger.— You! Who is then powerful, if not you, beloved children of Hunger?

— But we are impotent to cause them any positive harm.

King Hunger.— You! But even now, comfortably seated here in the vault, are you then not the gloom that quenches their lights? Then, perishing yourself, do you not effuse the venom that cankers them? You are the soil of the city, you are the groundwork of their life, you are the sticking carpet to which their feet adhere. Great darkness emanates from you, my children, and their pitiable lights hopelessly quiver in the gloom.

Chairman (proudly).— That's true.

Voices.— But that isn't all!

— Exterminate them!

— Poison the aqueducts.

— Lead us, father. We looked for you. Forsake us not.

— Or get you to the devil!

— They dance, damned!

Chairman.— Silence.

King-Hunger (rising).— Is not that enough? Are you not gratified? Then hearken, my children,— a great revolt is fermenting!

Voices.— Oho!

— Revolt!

— Mettlesome sport. Ho — ho — ho!

— Stock yourself with matches.

— Matches are cheap!

— A public calamity. In such times insurance premiums are not paid.

— Fire!

— It will be bright. Ho — ho — ho!

— Shut up!

King-Hunger.— But patience, my children. The days are short and fleeting, and again will Time strike the Bell of Alarm. And then — into the streets, into the houses!

(*Growls of delight and gnashing of teeth.*)

Voice.— Silence!

King-Hunger.— Until then, crawl out of your dens. As black shadows softly sneak among the people — and ravish, slay, steal, and laugh, jeer! I feel 'tis already easier to breathe, I smell fire, and freely the beasts creep out — night is nigh. And when the bell will strike —

(*Perfect chaos. Shouts of ecstasy, tumult, savage whistling. Some one whirls in madness as a whirligig falls and roars. Single exclamations are audible:*)

— Into the steets!

— Into the houses! Into their bedrooms!

— We'll set all on fire! Fire!

(Enraptured yelling.)

— I'll feed full.

(Prolonged savage whistling.)

— Let's burn the whole city.

— Specially, the books! Books, books, books!

— Dash their heads!

— Long live Death!

(Death rises and gravely bows.)

— Aha, you damned! Your hour is come! They dance. Soon, soon.

— There, upstairs.

(Lank, threatening hands, as a dry forest, stretch upwards. Whistling.)

— Your hour is come! Aha! Soon, soon. Dance, damned!

— Long live Death!

(DEATH rises again and gravely bows. The tumult is somewhat allayed. The CHAIRMAN, with brightly burning spots of suffusion on his cheek-bones, presses the hand of KING-HUNGER.)

— Thank you, father.

— You'll shed much blood, my son.

— Yes, father.

— Let's dance!

(Enraptured yelling.)

— I'll feed full!

— Let's dance!

— Music gratis.

— In the meantime here.

— Then upstairs!

Chairman (jumping upon a barrel he shouts).— Silence! (flauntingly). Gentlemen, I propose to avail ourselves of the free music and arrange a brief ball. I hope the ladies present will approve of it.

(Delighted yells.)

— What do you think, father?

King-Hunger (aloud).— Yes. They dance, let us dance, too. Let us unite in rejoicing, let the whole world hop! Dance, my children!

— Dance. Invite your ladies!

— Let father lead.

— Father! Father!

(Laughter. They surround FATHER. Laughing, he good-naturedly refuses. The scene wildly resembles a common bourgeois evening party.)

— But I never danced. Faith! Hold, hold, hold, where do you drag an old man?

— Please, father! father!

— Perhaps he? (*He points on DEATH.*)

Death (*angrily*).— Get you gone!

— But, please,—well, dear,—well, father!

— Well, all right. Now, would you be my lady?

Death.— Yes — with pleasure.

(*Above the orchestra plays a quadrille. They line up in pairs, with KING-HUNGER and DEATH in the lead.*)

King-Hunger.— Retournez. La première figure! Commencez.

The dance of DEATH.

All dance deftly, with artifice and whooping, with stunning beating of feet.

DEATH is mincing and languidly lays his head on his partner's shoulder, but he gradually grows excited and begins to cancan.

King-Hunger (*aloud*).— *Death*, solo!

(*Laughing they all stop and DEATH dances by himself; with an expression perfectly earnest and inflexible: grinning his white teeth; performing two, three movements on the same spot and gently squatting down, which show his extreme gayety. He sways his head slowly and coquettishly on all sides, shedding upon all the glister of his denuded white teeth. At first they regard him with laughter, even faintly applauding him, but gradually an anxious fear swoops upon them and smothers their voices. A dead silence. Suddenly a quarrel is started in the corner. Screaming. The CHAIRMAN's voice:—*

— Let my lady alone!

— Here there're no ladies of yours.

— Beware!

— Dare not strike! Oh, so you! I'll kill. Who's it? Hold! Hold!

(*A general row. Loud moans and cursing. Some one falls heavily. Out of the retreating crowd comes forth the CHAIRMAN.*)

Chairman (*maliciously grinning his teeth, knife in hand, he looks around*).

— Well, who else? Come!

— He found a fool!

— Who's that, eh?

King-Hunger (*condescendingly*).— Why thus with friends?

Chairman (*smiling blankly*).— Are there then friends?

Death (*surlily*).— There — they won't even let me dance.

Shouts

— Let's dance.

— Haul him away.

— Oho — ho — ho — ho!

(*Confusion. Insensible shouts and noise; prolonged savage whistling.*)

(*Curtain*)

THIRD SCENE

The Trial of the Starving

The Scene of a Court Room.

Aslope to the left, half way towards the spectators, the judges sit at an elevated table covered with black cloth. The attributes of legal procedure: a bare, somewhat used skull soiled with ink and stearine, a miniature English toy gallows, and a large, square quarter bottle filled with red, blood-like wine. There are five judges, KING-HUNGER presiding. The judges wear black mantles and pompous powdered wigs. The first two, on each side of KING-HUNGER, are unnaturally lank and emaciated, with long faces drawn out to disproportion, and their mouths resembling an inverted V; the next two are extremely stout, barrel-like, drowsy, and the ring-shaped folds around their mouths resemble the top of a clasped purse.

Below, the secretary is bending over a small table, with an uncommonly large goose quill in his hand.

At the back wall is an elevated pulpit, and behind it DEATH sits motionless.

Occupying the whole right corner of the scene, nearer this way, and separated from the tribunal by a low rail, the SPECTATORS are seated in armchairs and on comfortable stools. They are all dressed as for a ball. The women are in sumptuous gowns décolleté, adorned with gems, necklaces, diamond diadems, and gold; the fingers of one millionairess are laden with rings to the very nails. Only one young lady, although décolleté, is dressed very plainly in a chaste black gown.

The women are generally pretty and corpulent, with the exception of two sumptuously dressed old women, one of whom is all dressed in scarlet.

The men are in dress coats and surtouts, carefully shaven and dressed at the wigmaker's; they are neat and decorous. The professor, for instance, has gray hair of unusual whiteness and the countenance of a patriarch. Some of the men are stout — one of them, with an immense abdomen, hardly finds room in his armchair and continually falls asleep. Three youths: one with a monocle looks stupid, with an expression of transport on his pimpled face; the second is indifferent, surfeited; the third has luxuriant black hair, a demoniacal countenance, the expression of universal grief stamped on his face.

All described qualities, as stoutness and lankness, beauty and ugliness, attain extreme development.

At the rise of the curtain, KING-HUNGER, and after him the other four judges, rise and courteously bow first to DEATH, who gruffly nods his head, then to the SPECTATORS.

King-Hunger.—Ladies and gentlemen! Permit me to welcome you in the court of justice. Conforming with your wishes, which is law to us——
(*He bows and faces his colleagues, who by turns bowing affirm:*)

—A law.

—A law.

—A law.

—A law.

King-Hunger (continuing).—which is law to us, we gathered here to adjudicate the starving. Therefore, for this occasion we are attired in wigs and mantles, are seated in these elevated chairs, and have a secretary with a large goose pen down below us. (*The Secretary bows hastily.*) He is employed on a voluntary agreement and owns no voice in our decisions, but he commits errors in his protocols. These errors are oftentimes a source of contentious jurisdiction, but at other times—for everything in this life is inscrutable—(*the Abbot present among the spectators sighs and turns up his eyes to the ceiling*) they are valid reasons for new operative laws. Their significance and import, gracious ladies, the professor, whom I have the honor to behold in your illustrious society, will interpret to you. Now let's come to the trial.

(*The judges sit down.*)

—Usher in the first starveling.

(*Conversation among the spectators.*)

—What solemnity!

—The mantles and the wigs impart to them such an austere air. It is hard to recognize them.

—That's the way it ought to appear. It is indispensable that the court should inspire reverence.

—Mamma dear, what are the skull and gallows on the table for?

Professor.—They are symbols, my child. In England——

—See what a nose that judge has, just like the end of a dog's tail. Upon my word, he licked it with his tongue.

—How mocking! You are so young, you must respect the court.

—I respect him, honest! But he has such a funny nose!

—'Tis of no importance what sort of a nose the judge's is, but it is essential that he should be impartial and not clement with the starving.

—Otherwise we would hire others. They know it.

—The tribunal must be revered.

—We are the court. The court must be revered.

— How interesting! Just like on a stage.

The Stout Man (waking up).— Which one is tried?

— Not begun yet, your Excellency.

— What's the matter with them?

Voices.— They come!— They come!— How interesting! Oh, what a face!— Mamma, dear, he doesn't bite, does he?— Fear not, my child, his mouth is strongly muzzled. Hear! Hear!— Oh, how interesting!

(The first starveling, a ragged old man with lacerated feet, is conducted into the court room. A wire muzzle encases his face.)

King-Hunger.— Take the muzzle off the starveling. What's your offense, starveling?

Old Man (speaking in a broken voice).— Theft.

King-Hunger.— How much did you steal?

Old Man.— I stole a five-pound loaf, but it was wrested from me. I had only time to bite a small piece of it. Forgive me, I will never again —

King-Hunger.— How? Have you acquired an inheritance? Or won't you eat hereafter?

Old Man.— No. It was wrested from me. I only chewed off a small piece —

King-Hunger.— But how won't you steal? Why haven't you been working?

Old Man.— There's no work.

(The examination continues.)

(Conversation among the spectators.)

— And this unfortunate is tried! My soul is fired with indignation and contempt for mankind —

— Let it alone, is it not all the same to you?

— But understand!

— Do you curl your hair, or does it curl naturally?

— A little.

— My head turns bald. And this at twenty-four!

Professor.— Penal law, madam, is divided into two sections: the first and the second. The first section deals with crimes in general, and I must confess, madam, it is the least elaborated section.

Lady.— Oh, what a pity! Why is it not studied?

Professor.— Because the very nature of crime is a science yet not fully divined. On the other hand, the second section, dealing with crimes in particular and their respective penalties —

King-Hunger.— But where's your brood, starveling? Why don't they support you?

Old Man.— My children died of hunger.

King-Hunger.— Why did you not starve to death, as they?

Old Man.— I don't know. I had a mind to live.

King-Hunger.— Of what use is life to you, starveling?

Voices.— Indeed, how do they live? I don't comprehend it.

— To work.

— But when all work is performed? We cannot eternally furnish them work!

— To glorify God and be confirmed in conscience that life ——

— Well, I don't suppose they exalt Him.

— It were better if he were dead.

— A rather wearisome old fellow. And what style of trousers!

— Listen! Listen!

King-Hunger (rising he speaks aloud).— Now, ladies and gentlemen, we will feign to meditate. Honorable judges, I beg you to simulate a meditative air.

(The judges for a brief period appear in deep thought — they knit their brows, gaze up at the ceiling, prop up their noses, sigh and obviously endeavor to think. Venerable silence. Then with faces profoundly solemn and earnest, silent as before, the judges rise, and simultaneously they turn around facing DEATH. And all together they bow low and lingeringly, stretching themselves forward.)

King-Hunger (with bent head).— What is the pleasure of ——

Death (swiftly rising he wrathfully strikes the table with his clenched fist and speaks in a grating voice).— Condemned — in the name of Satan!

(Then as quickly he sits down and sinks into a malicious inflexibility. The judges resume their places.)

King-Hunger.— Starveling, you're condemned.

Old Man.— Have mercy!

King-Hunger.— Put the muzzle over him. Bring the next starveling.

(While the condemned OLD MAN is led out of the room the SPECTATORS express their feelings in the following words.)

(Judgment of Spectators.)

— Why should he live?

— Better let him die.

— Tell him so.

— Die, old man, die.

— Die, old man, die.

(Flourishing their hands, they softly whisper, as if waving on a dream.)

— Die, old man, die. Die, old man, die. Die, die, die!

(The next starveling is now brought into the court room.)

Cheerful Voices.— They come! They come!

— What a brute!

— Yes, that's nothing less than homicide!

— Observe his forehead.

— How dreadful!

— You are very tender, my child.

— Hush!

(The second starveling is quickly brought in and unmuzzled. He is a brawny fellow, with a low, bullish forehead, his breast is half exposed, and morosely he glances askance.)

King-Hunger.— What's your offense, starveling?

Starveling.— I ravished a damsel in the woods.

(Expressions of horror and delightful excitement.)

— How horrible!

— He's a beast.

— This takes my breath away.

— Such things disgrace humankind.

— Which — is tried?

King-Hunger.— Why have you done it?

— She wouldn't have married me. I desired her.

— Why, starveling, did you not content yourself with the women among you?

— Our women are rude and ugly from hunger and toil. But she was gentle and slender, with white hands. Is she with child?

— No, we employed scientific means and destroyed the conception.

Starveling (morosely).— You're crafty.

— What have you to say in your defense, starveling?

— Crimes of rape subdivide into ——

— Oh, please, professor, it is so interesting.

Starveling.— In defense? What! — if I could, I had ravished that one and that one and that one! The old woman in scarlet I wouldn't let her be yours.

(The old woman faints. All are in a flurry.)

— Horrors! He is a real beast!

— And me! You noticed he pointed to me. He would ravish me!

— You err. He pointed to me.

(They quarrel. The Girl in Black, who remained silent all the while, now suddenly rises defiantly challenging him.)

— And why do you imagine she wouldn't have married you! I would, perhaps.

Starveling (surlily).— Look at me closer.

Girl.— You are right. I would not. You are brutal.

Starveling.— There you are. But I would have ravished you.

Girl.— No, you would have sooner killed me.

Starveling.— Yes, and killed you.

(The girl sits down. The demoniacal-looking youth regards her dreamily, but she pays him no attention. Her people eye her with awe.)

— The idea!

King-Hunger.— Honorable judges, I beg you to simulate a meditative air. *(The repetition of the former procedure, with the same solemnity, and deep lingering bows to DEATH.)*

Death (he springs to his feet and strikes the table with his clenched fist).—

Condemned — in the name of Satan!

Starveling (to the girl).— Don't go into the woods all by yourself.

— Muzzle him. Show in the next starveling.

(The starveling is led into the room. She is a graceful, but extremely emaciated young woman, with a face pallid and tragic to view. The black fine eyebrows join over her nose; her luxuriant hair is negligently tied in a knot, falling down her shoulders. She makes no bows nor looks around, is as if seeing nobody. Her voice is apathetic and dull.)

— What's your offense, starveling?

— I killed my child.

— Oh, horrors! This woman is altogether destitute of motherly feelings.

— What do you expect of them? You astonish me.

— How charming she is. There's something tragical about her.

— Then marry her.

— Crimes of infanticide were not regarded as such in ancient times, and were looked upon as a natural right of parents. Only with the introduction of humanism into our customs —

— Oh, please, just a second, professor.

— But science, my child —

King-Hunger.— Tell us, starveling, how it happened.

(With drooping hands and motionless, the woman speaks up dully and dispassionately.)

Young Woman.— One night my baby and I crossed the long bridge over the river. And since I had long before decided, so then approaching the middle, where the river is deep and swift, I said: "Look, baby, dear, how the water is a-roaring below." She said, "I can't reach, mamma, the railing is so high." I said, "Come, let me lift you, baby dear." And when she was gazing down into the black deep, I threw her over. That's all.

King-Hunger.— Did she grip you?

Young Woman.— No.

King-Hunger.— She screamed?

Young Woman.— Yes, once.

King-Hunger.— What was her name?

Young Woman.— Baby dear.

King-Hunger.— No, her name. How was she called?

Young Woman.— Baby dear.

King-Hunger (*covering his face, he speaks with sad, quivering voice*).— Honorable judges, I beg to simulate a meditative air. (*The judges knit their brows, gaze on the ceiling, chew their lips. Venerable silence. Then they rise and gravely bow to DEATH.*)

Death.— Condemned — in the name of Satan!

King-Hunger (*rising he speaks aloud, extending his hands to the woman, as if veiling her in an invisible, black shroud*).— You're condemned, woman, do you hear? Death awaits you. In blackest hell you will be tormented and burnt on everlasting, slakeless fires! Devils will rack your heart with their iron talons! The most venomous serpents of the infernal abyss will suck your brain and sting, sting you, and nobody will heed your agonizing cries, for you'll be silenced. Let eternal night be over you. Do you hear, starveling?

Young Woman.— Yes.

King-Hunger.— Muzzle her.

Voice.— Wait! (*It is the GIRL IN BLACK. She hastily approaches the woman with an outstretched hand.*)

Girl in Black.— Give me your hand, hapless sister.

Young Woman.— I won't. I hate you.

Girl in Black.— Me?

Young Woman.— Yes, you. You'll be in Paradise.

Girl in Black.— You hate me? You murderess? (*She remains with her hand outstretched in space. Then throwing back her head, she screams in wrath, infuriated.*) Then take her into deepest hell!

(*A general uproar, but single exclamations are clearly audible.*)

— Hell for her! Hell! Hell!

— In deepest hell!

— Rack her heart with iron talons!

— Serpents, strangle her!

— Sting! Sting! Suck her brain! Rack her heart!

— Aha — ho — ho — ho — ho! (*Frenzied they brandish their hands at the woman.*)

King-Hunger (*authoritatively*).— Peace! (*Then blandly to the motionless woman.*) Go, my daughter. (*The STARVELING is led away. KING-HUNGER addresses the spectators in a frank and joyous manner.*) Now,

ladies and gentlemen, I propose recess for luncheon. Adjudication is a fatiguing affair, and we need to invigorate ourselves. (*Gallantly.*) Especially our charming matrons and the young ladies. Please!

(*Joyful exclamations.*)

— To dine! To dine!

— 'Tis about time!

— Mamma dear, where are the bon bons?

— Your little mind is only on bon bons!

— Which — is tried?

— Dinner is ready, your Excellency.

— Ah! Why didn't you wake me up before?

(*Everything assumes at once a happy, amiable, homelike aspect. The judges pull off their wigs exposing their bald heads, and gradually they lose themselves in the crowd, shake hands, and with feigned indifference they look askance contemplating the dining. Portly waiters in rich liveries, with difficulty and bent under the weight of immense dishes, bring gigantic portions: whole mutton trunks, colossal hams, high mountain-like roasts. Before the stout man, on a low stool, they place a whole roasted pig, which is brought in by three. Doubtful, he looks at it.*)

— Would you assist me, professor?

— With pleasure, your Excellency.

— And you, honorable judge?

— Although I am not hungry, but with your leave.

— I may, perhaps, be suffered to — (the ABBOT modestly speaks, his mouth watering.)

(*The four seat themselves about the pig and silently they carve it greedily with their knives. Occasionally the eyes of the PROFESSOR and of the ABBOT meet, and with swollen cheeks, powerless to chew, they are smitten with reciprocal hatred and contempt. Then choking, they ardently champ on. Everywhere small groups eating. DEATH produces a dry cheese sandwich from his pocket and eats in solitude. A heavy conversation of full-crammed mouths. Munching.*)

(*Conversation of Diners.*)

— Please, a little bit more. Very palatable.

— Just like a picnic. A capital fellow — that King-Hunger.

— We did her fine!

— Yet she's charming.

— Roast beef is eaten with blood. This —

— Mamma dear, why aren't they tried all at once?

— I don't know, my child, ask the professor.

— Professor!

— H'm?

— Professor!

— H'm?

— The deuce take it, where's my napkin?

— Gentlemen, a crime was committed; the counsellor's false teeth were stolen.

(*Laughter. Munching. In the rear of the stage KING-HUNGER is approached by the FIRST WORKINGMAN and the HOOLIGAN-CHAIRMAN. They are decently dressed and have been seated all the while unobserved on a distant bench.*)

Workingman.— How they gobble! Why are you with them, King? I cannot understand. Do you betray us? Beware!

Hooligan.— And these were your decisions, father? (*Angrily.*) You wish me to cut your throat on the spot?

King-Hunger.— You're blind. These are not my decisions. It is judgment upon my children.

Hooligan.— But you're presiding!

King-Hunger.— Is then my intent beyond your grasp? Every one once chancing here becomes their eternal enemy. I demoralize them and train them in abomination. I gnaw into the very heart core of their existence, leaving decay and perdition. They already have ceased to discern the truth, and this is the beginning of death. Do you comprehend it?

Hooligan.— But you accomplish it as a lackey!

King-Hunger (wrathfully).— Peace, my son! Wrong not one who is wretched. (*Restrainingly.*) Think,— then just because we try, are theft, murder, and violence lessened? They grow. Ask their professor —

Hooligan.— I don't understand it. I only see my brothers —

King-Hunger.— You have none!

Hooligan.— Father, is it true — that woman will perish in hell?

King-Hunger.— Yes, and you.

(*The HOOLIGAN weeps.*)

King-Hunger.— You cry. My son, you cry!

Hooligan.— O father, father, I only own a knife. Whom shall I slay?

Workingman.— We must not slay. We must work, work.

Hooligan.— O father, you say, hell's my doom. Be it so,— but how can I save her? I already see the devils drawing near her. Father, give me life, say if she can be saved?

King-Hunger.— No.

Hooligan.— You lie, old man!

Voices.— Well, we four didn't finish her all!

— She's big, your Excellency!

King-Hunger.—Depart. The end is inevitable. Listen, to-mor-row ———

—To-morrow? To-morrow?

—Hush! The bell will strike!

—To-morrow?

—Hush! Peace!

—Oh — oh — oh!

—Into the streets! Into the houses!

—Peace!

—To-morrow! To-morrow. To-morrow.

(They quietly depart, ominous, triumphant.)

—Professor, there's a little bone stuck in your beard.

—Goodness me, where's it?

—Would you have some candy?

—When you reflect that any camel has three stomachs, but I, King of Nature, am obliged to get along with one ———

King-Hunger (speaking from an elevation).—Ladies and gentlemen, it grieves me that I am constrained to inconvenience you. Please resume your seats. The court is in session.

(Hastily the judges pull on their wigs. During the following conversation all return to their respective seats.)

—Excuse me, my worthy colleague, but you've mistaken my wig.

—Oh, pardon me. Something wrong I thought ———

—How, not ended yet!

—It is unbearable. I must to the theater! How many are there?

—You are very frivolous, young man. Remember that we are here, not for enjoyment, but to discharge a social duty imposed upon us by our state of repletion and honesty.

—But upon my word!

—Allow me. You overlook that every day ———

—Excepting holidays.

—Certainly, excepting holidays, when we go to church and theater — every day in all parts of our world where civilization flourishes, the courts are in session, adjudging, and still we cannot try them all ———

—Who should be ———

—Certainly, who should be. Think, what would ensue if even for a time the court should suspend its operations ———

—But upon my honor ———

King-Hunger.—The secretary declares that he made four mistakes, but cannot find where. However the errors, he informs, are of a nature

that present valid reasons for new operative laws. (*The SECRETARY bows hastily. Weak applause.*)

King-Hunger.— Show in the next starveling.

(*Two are quickly brought in — a lean little boy, muzzled, and a ragged, elderly woman, anguish and confusion depicted in her face. The woman bows repeatedly and humbly on all sides.*)

King-Hunger.— What's your offense, starveling? (*One of the lank judges suddenly interrupts.*)

Judge.— Allow me, why is she unmuzzled?

Jailer.— She is the boy's mother, and wants to speak in his behalf.

Judge.— She must be muzzled if she desires to speak. I reprimand you. Secretary, take notice.

King-Hunger.— What is your offense, starveling?

Woman (*she falls on her knees and raises her hands as if in prayer*).— Have mercy! He stole an apple for me, your Honor. I was sick, thought he, 'Let me bring her a little apple.' Pity him! Tell them that you won't any more, well! Speak!

Starveling.— I won't any more.

Woman.— I've already punished him myself. Pity his youth, cut not at the root his bright little days!

Voices.— Indeed, pity one and then the next. Cut the evil at its roots.

— One needs courage to be ruthless.

— It is better for them.

— Now he is only a boy, but when he grows up —

— Mamma dear, I pity the poor woman. May I send her alms?

— You have some small change.

— Lovely child! What a heart!

King-Hunger.— I beg the honorable judges to simulate a meditative air.

(*During this whole procedure the mother gazes with hope on the judges. When DEATH strikes the table with his fist and hoarsely shouts.*)

— Condemned — in the name of Satan!

(*Shuddering, the woman rises from the floor.*)

King-Hunger.— Starveling, you are condemned.

(*In delirium, with hands raised to heaven, the woman screams, infuriated.*)

Woman.— Then be you cursed! Let your children also perish! Let mad wolves mangle them!

King-Hunger.— A muzzle! Quick, muzzle her!

Woman.— Let their hearts be parched! Let their souls turn into stone! Let —

(*The woman is muzzled. The triumphant voice of the HOOLIGAN-CHAIRMAN.*)

Father! You see how they pity our children. Till to-morrow!

— To-morrow!

— Silence!

— I see, my son!

— Silence! Who's that!

— Silence!

King-Hunger.— Usher in the next starveling.

(With great precaution three jailers lead a man of an unusually powerful mien. His eye is bright and open minded, his voice is calm and clear.)

King-Hunger.— What's your offense, starveling?

Starveling.— I don't know. I wronged no one. I trust the court will acquit me. I was always faithful and performed my duties.

General perplexity.

King-Hunger (in a whisper he consults the judges, then addresses the spectators).— I perceive, ladies and gentlemen, that the man's guilt is not altogether apparent to you. But it is obvious, and you will presently discern it. He is a slave, and as a slave he is too strong and honest. This in itself is obnoxious to us, people of refined culture, and, therefore, less brawny. Indeed, he is faithful to-day, but who can trust the to-morrow? Then in his strength and integrity we will encounter a violent and dangerous enemy. Undoubtedly he must die, in the name of justice.

(Judgment of the Spectators.)

— That's very true. Strong slaves are dangerous, even if they are faithful.

— Yes, I observe, King-Hunger is our loyal friend.

— What a revolting body! A slave, and such strong limbs!

— Chain him!

— He will break the chains. Death for him! Death!

King-Hunger.— I beg the honorable judges to simulate a meditative air.

(The judges meditate, and DEATH strikes with his clenched fist.)

— Condemned — in the name of Satan!

(The youth is led away with the same precaution, and in his place appears another starveling. This is an extremely savage-looking creature. Long hands reaching to his knees, with enormous, wrinkled, filthy fingers; his head and face all covered with disheveled hair; dim, small eyes; a beastly gait, toes inward, timorous and suspicious. But there are touches of something human. The creature is clothed in a very odd primitive costume, a combination of the bark of trees, artfully braided, some coarse cloth and queer garters. When entering he makes an effort to smooth his hair, but his fingers are only ensnared in their tangles.)

(*Conversation of the Spectators.*)

— But that's a gorilla!

— Gracious me! Are we to try the whole zoölogical garden? I must to the theater!

— No, he's a man!

— Oh, no, a gorilla! Just notice his head.

— And hands!

— We shouldn't unmuzzle him. Maybe he bites!

— Why, he bows!

— He is a man!

— No, it is a trained animal. What could it be?

— Would I had a catalogue! In such cases it is impossible without one, for how are we to try him without a classification!

— What an odd style! It would be interesting to meet his tailor.

King-Hunger.— Since doubts agitate us, tell us, starveling, who are you?
(*The starveling remains silent.*)

— It does not understand!

— Why, certainly, it is a gorilla.

King-Hunger.— Who are you, starveling? Answer. Do you understand human speech?

Starveling (answering in a dull, brutish voice).— We are the peasants.

— I told you 'tis a man.

(*A general outburst of laughter.*)

Starveling.— Why do the gracious gentlemen laugh?

— That's none of your concern, starveling. You won't understand it. What's your offense?

Starveling.— We killed the devil. (*Roars of laughter.*)

— Hear! Hear!

— But he's a dear!

— How naive! (*Laughter.*)

King-Hunger.— It was a man whom you burnt.

Starveling.— No, it was the devil. Curé told us so, and then we burnt him.

(*Slight confusion among the spectators.*)

— What's that?

— He lies. It is impossible.

Professor.— Here is the pernicious influence of the church on the development of the masses. Crimes provoked by superstition —

Millionairess.— Oh, please, dear professor, don't insinuate ill of the church in my presence; you know, I am a believer.

Abbot (one side of his face eyes the PROFESSOR with hatred, the other smiles

pleasantly on the public).—He has evidently misunderstood, ladies. The honorable preceptor only wished to inculcate a belief in the existence of good and evil spirits, but surely not to kill. Religion, dear ladies, prohibits murder.

— Oh, yes, that's another story!

— An altogether different affair. What has Curé to do with it, if he is so stupid!

— Dear me! He looks like a gorilla, but lies like a man!

— And accuses respectable people.

— Villain!

King-Hunger.— I beg the honorable judges to simulate a meditative air.

(The judges for some time feign to think. Then, with respectfully bowed heads, they stretch themselves toward DEATH, who, infuriated, springs to his feet striking the table with his clenched fist.)

— Condemned — in the name of Satan! Satan! Satan!

(All shudder as if violently shocked. And he, growing more furious, tall, black, dreadful, pounds the table, shedding upon all the dead glister of his denuded white teeth.)

— In the name of Satan! Satan! Satan! Satan! Satan!

King-Hunger (rising).— Be calm, honorable —

— Satan! Satan! Satan!

(All rise in horror, gaping, stupefied.)

— Satan! Satan!

(At last he abates and sinks down into malicious inflexibility.)

King-Hunger (quietly).— Nothing particular, ladies and gentlemen. Apparently a slight weariness. Please, sit down. Take the starveling away.

(Still gaping they sit down and for a time continue gazing on DEATH.)

King-Hunger (whispers to the judges, and then joyously announces).— I congratulate you, ladies and gentlemen. To-day our difficult and ungrateful task is now over. But in compliance with an ancient custom of a symbolic nature we, the judges, must each drink a glass of this liquid. Pour out, honorable judge. No fears, ladies and gentlemen, it is not blood, although the color is bloodlike; unfortunately, the custom demands it, and it is only wine.

(They rise and saluting each other drink the wine. A glass of it is proffered to DEATH, but he pushes it away with his bony hand.)

King-Hunger.— In conclusion, again conforming with custom, I will indulge in a brief speech intending to elucidate how much better, more just, and nobler we are than all other peoples. Ladies and gentlemen! To-day you witnessed a highly instructive spectacle. Divine, eternal justice has found in us, as judges and your retainers, its brilliant reflection

on earth. Subject only to the laws of immortal equity, unknown to culpable compassion, indifferent to cursing and entreating prayers, obeying the voice of our conscience alone — we illumed this earth with the light of human wisdom and sublime, sacred truth. Not for a single moment forgetting that justice is the foundation of life, we have crucified the Christ in days gone by and since, to this very day, we cease not to grace Golgotha with new crosses. But, certainly, only ruffians, only ruffians are hanged. We showed no mercy to God himself, in the name of the laws of immortal justice — would we be now disconcerted by the howling of this impotent, starving rabble, by their cursing and raging? Let them curse! Life herself blesses us, the great sacred truth will screen us with her veil, and the very decree of history will not be more just than our own. (*Stormy applause. KING-HUNGER restores order with a movement of his hand, and continues smiling, calm, hissing like a serpent.*) What have they gained by cursing? What? They are there, we're here. They are in dungeons, in galleys, on crosses, but we will go to the theater. They perish, but we will devour them — devour — devour!

(*Joyful, with greedy eyes, he looks around. Suddenly, at his side, the lean judge begins to titter in a piping voice, straightening up, with hands resting upon his knees, and his laughter is like the bleating of a goat. Now he is joined by the second, and the third. The stout judge, with hands folded over his rolling belly, laughs to suffocation, in short, thick exhalations, as if coming through a funnel. It sounds thus.*)

— Tee — hee — hee — hee — hee — hee — hee!

— Hoo! — Hoo! — Hoo!

(*The laughter grows contagious, broadens, leaping into various corners as fire carried by the wind, and soon all are a-roaring. They laugh to delirium, to madness, to hoarseness. All has blended into one black, wide-open, savagely roaring mouth. DEATH alone is malcontent. He laughs not. Suddenly he strikes the table with his clenched fist, trying to attract attention. At once they cease, and frightened, stare at him. Gathering the papers into a portfolio he silently threatens with his scraggy, dark finger. All rise. Unresponsive to bows, DEATH heads for the door in quick, short steps.*

(*Curtain*)

FOURTH SCENE

The revolt of the Starving and the treachery of KING-HUNGER.

The night of the Great Revolt.

An extremely rich, magnificent hall. Statues, paintings of old and new

masters, mosaic, marble, tropical plants. Through a wide arch on the right — a wide marble staircase leading down; through another arch, on the left, is seen the library — rows of cases filled with books in superb bindings.

In precaution, not all the lights burn, and the hall is dimly lighted. Large windows that almost reach to the floor occupy the whole back wall, and behind them a bright, fiery redness of the conflagration. When the hall darkens, broad purple beams of light fall from the huge windows upon the floor, and the people standing there throw off long, black shadows. The confused arrangement of the furniture, the difficulty of discerning the hosts from the guests, the movement of the dancers, the neglect of certain decorum, impart a sense of dread and expectation. The orchestra on the choir now strikes up in lively, bravura, then stops discordantly; and only some one trumpet stupidly reiterates its note, and then dismayed it suddenly cuts off short, in a sigh.

The palace safeguarded by a watch below is deemed a relatively secure place, and the revolt has driven here all those hostile to it or fearing it. Like the spectators in the court room, the ladies here are sumptuously dressed, in décolleté, ornate with gems, beautiful and corpulent. The men are in dress coats, some in surtouts and even in blouses; thus a group of artists and authors are dressed with somewhat artificial negligence. The scientists are nearly all in frock coats and short surtouts, some quite untidy. A few clergymen with modest, favor-courrying faces, are seen mingling with the crowd; they are neglected and rudely treated at times.

Their movements are anxious. Groups are formed now and then and as quickly dissolved — all seek something new and cheering; scarcely anybody is sitting down. Cautiously they often come near the windows and peer into the street, vainly trying to draw over the transparent curtains.

During the whole scene the bell peals somewhere near in ravenous, summoning alarms; and it seems that the redness is brighter and the movements of the guests more restless after each powerful stroke. The bell now augments, resounding hope, joy, almost triumph; then it grows sluggish, torpid, rueful, as if the hands and the heart of the old bellringer are weary.

The raucous trumpet of DEATH sounds incessantly. Now distant, now dreadfully near, it at times drowns all vivid and dull sounds; then the lights seem to wither, everything stiffens in immobility; and long, black shadows fall upon the floor from the huge windows lit up with a red light.

The curtain rises at the mingling of all these sounds — the florid but discordant music, the raucous trumpet, and the frequent peals of the bell.

(Conversation of the guests.)

— I still cannot believe that the revolt burst out. How terrible!

— Yes, many wouldn't believe. It happened so suddenly. Only yesterday everything was tranquil and peaceful.

— But listen, what's doing there! That death ——

— Each stroke of the bell crushes my head as a hammer!

— But this means that in a moment they may come here and slay us all: men, women, and children.

— We are guarded.

— Nonsense! Do you believe in the steadfastness of those mercenary rascals below? Let power only be on the other side, and all's ended. Where's King-Hunger?

— There.

— O God! Is it possible he betrays? I always said that we shouldn't trust that dastard lackey, that rogue, that impostor!

— Stay your curses. It is yet unknown where he stands — whether with us or with the rebels!

— Why are they playing? Tell them to stop.

— 'Tis easier with music.

— Nonsense! They may hear us from the street.

— They can't hear us. They have their own music. Listen!

(They listen attentively.)

— Oh, my God, how terrible. We must not attract their attention. Hey, there, music, quit!

— 'Tis uneasy without the hosts.

— Oh, isn't it just the same? Stop, you, there, hey!

(The playing ceases discordantly. Terror of the guests.)

— What happened?

— Why has the music stopped? What happened?

— They come!

A shrill, trembling voice.—Gentlemen, they come! Gentlemen! Gentlemen!

(All run. Hysterical weeping.)

— Not at all, be calm, nothing has happened.

— Barricade the doors!

The voice of the host.—What's the trouble? What's the matter?

— Some one ordered the orchestra to stop playing, now they are all panic stricken.

— Who ordered? How did he dare? Music, play! Ladies and gentlemen, nothing has happened. We will dance soon. Gentlemen, invite the ladies for a cotillion.

(Gradual appeasing. Laughing here and there.)

— May I have the honor of a dance?

— You tread on my dress.

— Pardon.

(Conversation of the scientists.)

— Indeed, nothing is to be feared. If King-Hunger is with us.

— Are you confident in that?

— But, at any event, history —

— Oh, it is so precarious — history. Do we then know authentic history?

— And you, historian, say that?

(Suppressed laughter and smiles.)

— I only know that it is terrible. How can you estimate the energy King-Hunger has stored up in these obscure, miserable masses? Perhaps it will endure only a momentary outburst; perhaps it will overthrow all, our whole civilization. *(Pointing to the windows.)* Do you know what's burning? Would they were houses. But what if museums are on fire? Libraries?

— Fire does not deliberate.

— O God!

— Will everything perish?

(A few lights are put out. The darkness increases and the windows glimmer with a brighter purple. Terror.)

— What's the matter?

— Why is it dark? What happened?

— Gentlemen! Gentlemen!

— The current is cut off!

— It will soon be dark!

— Light some candles! Where are the candles? Hurry up.

— Oh, nothing, be calm! What cowards!

— May I have the honor?

— Are you mad! Dance now?

(A waltz is played.)

— Why a waltz? It was said, a cotillion!

— Oh, what's the difference, waltz, cotillion, or the devil?

— How vulgar!

— Pardon!

(A solitary pair whirls in the twilight of the room and soon disappears somewhere.)

— News, gentlemen! News!

— What! What!

— News! Listen!

(The music subsides in confusion. A young man steps out into the middle. His dress is deranged, his face is pale, a bloody spot on his forehead. He is surrounded.)

— I was there.

— Oh, heavens!

— Speak! Speak!

— It is terrible. As if I've escaped from another world, seen only in dreams. Deserted streets, roars sweeping through the air. Whence — I don't know. A murderous darkness. Black shadows. Corpses everywhere. Glowing, silent ruins, and not a soul in sight. Where are the people?

— Are you wounded?

— Suddenly — a mob. A whirlwind of hoots, bodies, gnashing of teeth. Who are they? I have never seen them before. They ravage everything. They slay each other. They slay the children. I saw them set on fire a great building that sheltered women and children!

— Oh, horror!

(*Somebody sobs hysterically.*)

— Silence!

— They are the Starving.

— 'Tis the mob! They come here!

— Shaggy, half-naked monsters! Who are they? I have never seen them before. And still more — 'tis rumored, the village is stirring, all villages move on the city.

— The end is come!

— We are lost!

— 'Tis the revolution.

— Defame not the revolution. This is a rebellion. You hear, they burn women and children.

— The beasts came out of the woods!

— The woods move on us.

— We are lost!

Young Man. — 'Tis rumored, the squeaking of their carts is already heard. They will load them with the spoil of our city.

— Hordes of barbarians swarm upon us.

— The beasts came out of the woods!

— I hear the squeaking of their carts. We are lost!

— Put out the lights!

(*More lights are put out. DEATH's trumpet blares somewhere very near.*)

Young Man. — I saw them burning women and children. I will not live after this. I only came to tell you — to warn you. There's my father — my mother. Tell them that I died.

(*Then quickly drawing a revolver he shoots himself. Terror. All run. The body is grabbed and hauled away.*)

- What's the matter?
- They're here. Gentlemen!
- No, somebody shot himself.
- Why is he terrifying us all!
- Wash the blood away.
- Music! Music!
- He said, the National Art Gallery is in flames.
- What?
- The Art Gallery is in flames.
- Gentlemen, news! The National Art Gallery is burning!
- (*A rush to the windows.*)
- Where! Where!
- There.
- That's true!
- Caution, gentlemen, be cautious!
- Draw the curtains over!
- The Art Gallery in flames!
- Say, you stepped on my toe!
- How it blazes!
- What? What? What?

(*Greatly excited, an ARTIST, in a velvet blouse and a large white cravat, comes rushing out of the library. Other artists follow him.*)

Artist.— Is it true? The Art Gallery's burning?

Voices.— Yes. Yes. Look.

Artist.— The Art Gallery in flames? Murillo's burning? Velasquez's burning? Rubens? Giorgione?

— Yes. Yes. See, what a blazing sky.

— Of course — oil colors.

Artist (he sobs, covering his face, then screams in delirium).— I won't let them! I won't suffer them to burn the paintings. I won't! (*He runs to the door.*)

— Where's he running?

— Is he mad?

— Hold him!

— Gone!

— I should like to see him stopping them. Remarkable visionaries — those artists!

The Artists (in a group).— Murillo is burning!

— Velasquez is burning!

— Giorgione is burning!

— O God! O God!

(A few artists kneel before an ancient dark painting and murmur prayerfully, with drooping heads:)

— O thou, immortal painting!

— O thou, wondrous creation of human genius!

— Celestial beauty rests on thee. And thou wouldst die!

— Thou art the realization of our whole life. And thou wouldst die!

— And men will perish with thee.

— And beauty will perish. Who will care to live, when beauty perishes?

— Forgive us, O sublime, celestial painting. We are powerless to save thee.

— Death alone remains for us!

(Fitful, malicious laughing of the guests.)

Voices.— Here people perish, and they are about their pictures!

— Fanatics, they only mind their pictures. What are they? We may perish here, that's important!

— Paintings are good only in peaceful times.

— Their pictures won't save us! Paintings!

— But 'tis a pity.

— Nonsense! Were we only spared they will paint new pictures for us.

— Even better ones!

— And plenty. We may perish — that's important!

— The Lord won't suffer the innocent to perish.

— Oh, please reverend father. You ought to have taught those villains that hunger is the path to felicity, not to rebellion!

— We taught, but — *(The ABBOT stands with his hands spread out.)*

— Don't they believe?

— They believe, but — *(bashfully)*. To-day they hanged one abbot. It is awful to think what they will answer God!

— Why, did the cord break?

(The ABBOT walks off bashfully.)

Old Man in Uniform.— I have always declared the necessity of reforms. 'Tis bad policy to drive them to the utmost. A morsel of bread tossed in time, even simply a sympathetic smile — *(A kind smile plays upon his aged face.)*

— Oh, please, reforms, anything you wish. We may perish, that's important. Do you understand? We!

(Enraged they press about the OLD MAN, striking their breasts with clenched fists.)

— We may perish, that's important. We!

— We!

— Do you understand? We!

— We! We!

(*Furiously shouting, 'We, We, We,' moving in a body, they drive the OLD MAN into an obscure corner. The sky reddens. The sounds of the trumpets and the bell grow violent.*)

(*Dejected voices.*)

— Heavens! Are we to die!

— Life's so gay. When they come here, I will fall upon my knees, I will implore them not to kill me — life is so sweet.

— Dear me, I have just ordered a new gown. Oh, my God, I have just ordered a new gown!

— Are we to die!

— I wish not death. I want to live! They dare not kill me, if I want to live!

— To live! To live!

(*Elbowing, sadly wailing 'To live! To live,' they hopelessly run about the hall. The orchestra strikes up a wild, stupid tune, and as if frightened it wailingly abates. The PROFESSOR enters, extremely agitated. Nobody pays him attention. Crowding.*)

Professor.— Please! Please! Let me, please! (*Almost crying.*) I must tell you! I must tell you!

— What's the matter?

— What's his business?

— Who's he? What's he about?

— Gentlemen, news!

(*In confusion they crowd about the PROFESSOR.*)

Professor.— Gentlemen! I am just from the street,— they burn our books!

— What books?

— What's he about?

— They burn some books!

— Well, what of it! What does he want?

Professor.— Our treasure — the pride of humanity — our august sanctuary — they burn our books, gentlemen. Senseless mob, what art thou doing? What art thou doing? Oh, my friends, my friends,— and when I — when I rushed to rescue — one small — volume — tiny, in quarto — he, villain, struck me. (*He weeps, tottering he extends his hands, but meets void space.*) Why did he strike me? Did I snatch his bread away? I worked honestly, I own only this black — black coat. Nothing more. Not even another coat! Villain! (*He weeps, moving his swollen, short-*

sighted eyes about the room.) And when I reflect that it all must perish — those beautiful statues, those wondrous shelves of books — in such bindings — those dear, charming, spiritual faces. Oh, my friends! (*Intently gazing he puts out his hands, but they regard him openly in deep silence. Then he continues, quiet and perplexed.*) Where are the faces? Where are the faces? What's that? Who's it? (*aloud*) Who's it?

(*With trembling hands he searches for his spectacles, and fixing them on he looks around. Disdainfully smiling, not deigning a reply, they walk away as if he were a madman or a child. Silent, looking perplexedly around he follows them, with a shattered, aged gait, and secludes himself in the library. Wailing — despondency, grief, utter helplessness, almost submission ring in it.*)

— We must die!

— Perdition is near!

— Who will save us? We perish.

— There's no hope. We perish.

— God has forsaken us.

— Death! Death! Death!

Girl in Black (*she appears and speaks aloud*).— What's the matter — why don't you dance? Where's the orchestra? Music! (*Silence. She is perplexed, then angrily.*) Why now? Are you afraid? Why do so few lights burn? Afraid? Oh, cowards! I'm ashamed to stay with you! Dance! (*She stamps her foot.*)

(*Quiet, malicious, crafty voices:*)

— She's mad!

— To dance — now!

— Come away from her.

— She is mad. She must be shut up in a madhouse.

— Away!

— Let's away! She's dangerous. She screams.

— They may hear us there. Let's away! Away!

Girl in Black.— Not in darkness, but in the brilliant light of our life we must meet them. Do you hear, cowards! We must meet them — dancing — dancing — dancing! Let our death be beautiful! Do you hear?

(*With backs turned upon her, stooping, they silently walk out on tiptoes. Only their backs are seen, timorous, shrinking, crafty. Quiet, malignant, frightened whispers.*)

— She's mad!

— Let's away from her.

— Away!

— Hush! Hush!

— Let's deceive her! Let's away quietly!

— Hush! Hush!

— Let's deceive her!

— Hush!

Girl in Black.— O cowards! Oh, my God, why all this! Dance, dance! (*Frenzied she sobs, stamping her foot.*)

Whispers.— Silence! Silence! Let's away! Hush!

Girl in Black.— You will not! Then see, I'll dance myself!

(*She tries to dance. A YOUNG MAN, who stood by the column until now, comes out, addressing her with exquisite politeness.*)

Young Man.— May I have the pleasure?

(*Without music they whirl around in the void space for a time. And those, stooping, with backs turned upon them, look over their shoulders and whisper, filling the hall with hissing.*)

— Mad! Mad! Mad! Mad!

Young Man (pausing).— Let's away from here. You have no place among them.

(*He escorts the GIRL through the hastily receding crowd. As soon as they are out of sight, all pour into the middle of the hall, roaring with laughter.*)

Jubilant voices.— She's gone!

— Ha! Ha — ha! Gone!

— We fooled her!

— How they danced!

— Ha — ha!

Wrathful voice.— She must be shut up in a madhouse. Her screaming will bring the whole city upon us.

— Bind her!

— Stuff her mouth!

— A little more — and I would have clutched her throat.

— To dance! We perish — that's important!

— Let's pray to God.

— Nonsense! God knows better what's the trouble here. We should pray to the devil! Devil!

— How they talk — it is blasphemy! God is with us!

— I will not die. I want to live, live. But who will give me life, God or devil, is all the same.

— He has lost his senses!

— No, he's right! We must pray to the devil!

(*Turmoil.*)

Servant (rushing in he speaks to his master).— They come here! They come here!

— What?

— They come!

Master of the House (breathless and aloud).— Attention, gentlemen! They come here. Put out the lights. Put out the lights. Haste! There's hope that they won't notice us in the darkness. Put out the lights.

(General tumult, but no voices are audible. Panic stricken with fear, silent, blind-like, they move in various directions, running up against each other, while the lights are extinguished. On all sides, from every door, appear timorous, distracted figures. The artists enter. The last light dies out, and perfect darkness sets in, in which with a portentous glow stand out the red quadrilateral windows. Through the central huge window of massive glass is perceptible the black silhouette of the ancient church tower, behind which are trailing curls of fiery smoke, and tongues of fire are seen flaring high. An incessant pealing of the bell comes from there. Somewhere near, the raucous trumpet of DEATH. Prolonged wailing in the darkness.)

— Perdition is near.

— They come, I already perceive their brutal steps.

— Art will perish! Velasquez, Murillo, Giorgione!

— And we'll perish! And we! And we!

— Our end is nigh!

— Have mercy, O starving!

— Forgive us, ye starvelings. We'll do everything for you!

— Velasquez will perish!

— O Lord, have mercy upon us!

— He hears us not! He has forsaken us!

— He never stood for us. Pray to the devil!

— Devil! Devil!

— O God! O God!

— Come, O devil!

— Shield us, O devil!

— O God! O God!

— Devil! Devil!

— Perdition is come!

(Moaning. Suddenly in the darkness, from the side of the stairs, rings a shallow, but a self-confident, composed, and loud voice.)

— What's the matter? Why is it dark here? Is the current cut off?

(Simultaneously frightened and joyful voices.)

— Devil! Devil!

(A few lamps are lighted at the entrance, illuminating the little figure of the ENGINEER. He is of small stature, bald, slovenly dressed, but exceedingly self-confident. Homely — but has a fine, prominent forehead. Smiling he

talks to the servant — he is democratic and ignores formalities; the latter answers, respectfully moving his hands apart.)

Engineer.— Oh, I see! Nonsense, gentlemen, nonsense. You may turn all lights on. Turn them on, old boy, they aren't likely now —

(He produces a dirty handkerchief and loudly blows his nose. General rejoicing; cries of 'Engineer! Engineer!' All the lights burn. The host embraces the ENGINEER.)

— News, my dear, news!

— News, gentlemen! The engineer brought us news!

— Let him speak!

— Hear, hear!

Engineer.— Nothing of importance, ladies and gentlemen. I must inform —

(He brings out his handkerchief and loudly blows. Impatient, aroused voices.)

— What manners!

— We wait, and he —

— He's blowing —

Engineer.— Had I constructed my nose, gentlemen, it would certainly have had no use of a kerchief. But that cold —

Voices.— News! News!

Engineer.— The news is not important. The revolt is still on. Those people have burned something there — the National Art Gallery, I guess. Such blockheads. Yet, maybe, the Gallery was set on fire by our projectiles.

Voice.— Then it is true? Go ahead! To the point!

Engineer.— I may add, that the revolt seems to spread over new regions. But we, engineers, have embraced some measures —

Voice.— Where's King-Hunger? Have you seen him?

Engineer.— Beg pardon, I took no interest in that question. So then, I presume to report, we have embraced some measures — I fear, no one here is well versed in mathematics.

Voice.— Leave mathematics out!

Engineer.— Very well. So then, my colleagues and I produced a few projectiles of a special destructive power, so to speak, whose magnitude, dear ladies, I am at a loss to determine. Imagine, for example, an ordinary public square filled with people — and enough one or two such shells —

Voices.— Oho!

— Capital! So, so! To pieces!

— What horror!

— Nonsense. I said that we must pray to the devil. Bravo!

— Bravo! Bravo!

(*Applause. The ENGINEER bows and brings his handkerchief out again.*)

Engineer.— Excuse me, ladies and gentlemen, but really such a bad cold —

— No matter! Please, please!

— Has he, truly, no clean handkerchief?

— Oh, let alone, he's a dear.

Engineer.— Then on Sunny Hill we planted a line of immense machine guns of enormous power. And should the revolt still continue, we'll shower the city —

— Impossible! But we?

— The innocent would perish!

— 'Tis impossible!

Engineer.— Of course, gentlemen, there's a certain danger for you. But at present, thanks to the work of my colleagues —

Voices.— Bravo!

Engineer.— The art of firing has reached such perfection —

Voices.— Bravo! Bravo!

(*Applause.*)

Engineer (*he bows sideways and beckons to the servant*).— Would you, my dear, fetch me a glass of cognac?

The Host (*vociferously*).— Cognac for our honorable engineer.

Engineer.— Such a cold, you know. In conclusion, gentlemen, one more trivial, yet comforting intelligence. Among those starvelings we discovered for a relatively small compensation a few sufficiently wise and agile fellows and entrusted them with orders of a confidential nature. And at this moment those blockheads began their self-destruction in a most admirable manner.

(*Roars of laughter.*)

— To be sure! Certainly!

— What else is to be expected of them! Blockheads! Idiots! Brutes!

— Great! Great! Bravo!

— The devil helps.

(*Bashfully the ABBOT shakes his head.*)

Engineer (*he takes the served cognac and drinks with a salutation*).— To your health, ladies.

Lady (*the host's beautiful wife speaks aloud*).— Sir Engineer, you are homely, you use a dirty handkerchief, you are vulgar, your bearing is intolerable in refined society — but you are our saviour, and I am upon my knees before you.

(She kneels. The rest cry out.)

Voices.— And I! And I! And I!

Lady (continuing).— You have a bad smell about you, but if you desire, I'll belong to you.

Voices.— And I! And I!

Lady.— My husband will permit it, because he, as all here, understand that you're our saviour. Let me kiss your hand.

(She crawls upon her knees for the hand. The rest follow her.)

Engineer (vulgarly).— Nonsense, nonsense, my ladies. Perhaps later I'll avail myself of your sweet proposals, but now — I'm weary and would like to wash my hands.

(He withdraws, accompanied by a detachment of ladies.)

Voices.— Let's dance!

— Invite the ladies.

— How bright!

(The orchestra plays. Dancing. More and more infrequently rings the bell, and for a time DEATH's trumpet sounds almost incessantly. Now he stifles the bell; now he drowns and smothers the music; now he invades the hall, raucous, triumphant, furious. All listen with outstretched necks. Conversation in whispers.)

— Death!

— How he mows!

— Terrible!

— Do you hear?

— One feels how hundreds of people fall.

— Thousands!

— He is infuriated!

— Death! Death!

(Suddenly a dead silence, whose cruel unexpectedness benumbs and renders torpid. The sounds of the bell die away. One more hoarse sound of the trumpet and then it abates. Dead silence. The electric lights burn brightly. All are congealed in their places and gaze inquiringly, anxiously. Movement on the stairs. Slow, heavy steps.)

What's that?

(KING-HUNGER enters. He is imbrued with blood; his harassed face is deadly pale. A peaked, red crown is on his head, and something red, bloody, like pieces of human flesh, on its sharp edges. Unmindful of all present, with a heavy step, he passes to the middle of the hall and there he stands for a time in the attitude of hopeless despair and grief. Whispering.)

— What's that? What's the matter with him?

King-Hunger (raising his blank, as if sightless eyes, he quietly utters).—

All's ended. They all — there — lie. Never to rise again. And again I am — your — lackey.

(The orchestra plays a triumphant, victorious march.)

(Curtain)

FIFTH SCENE

The defeat of the STARVING and the terror of the VICTORS.

Evening. Bloody sunset. The whole sky is one taciturn, noiseless red fire — as if flooded with thick, dark blood. The earth and everything thereon seems almost black.

A deserted, barren moor; not a tree, not even a bush, not one tall figure. Level — only in the middle, near the left border, quite a high rugged hillock, and on its summit an immense, long, old machine-gun on high wheels. Leaning on the machine in profile, his face in the direction of its mouth, motionless, towers KING-HUNGER.

Before the mouth of the gun, vanishing in the dense twilight, are the prostrated corpses of the slain. They are the Starving. The sharp silhouette of DEATH is vaguely outlined over the dead field. He stands immobile, as if upon guard.

Behind the gun, at some distance, are the VICTORS; they appeared as SPECTATORS in the court room, then in the magnificent hall on the night of the great revolt. Like dark silhouettes they pass. Some stand in groups, pressed close, and their figures are clearly delineated on the background of the sunset. Enforced by respect for DEATH, they converse quietly, in suppressed whispers. The purpling sky sheds its reflection upon the whole scene.

(Conversation of the Victors.)

— How dark!

— The sunset is so beautiful. As if a sea of fire or blood.

— Winds will rise to-morrow.

— Careful, tuck up your dress, here's blood.

— Oh, yes! Thank you.

(Cautiously she circuits the livid spot, tucking her skirts up.)

— How silent!

— Yes — not a rustle.

— 'Tis always so, where many dead lie.

— There's nothing more peaceful than dead men.

— How many of them lie here?

— Many. Many.

— Yes. Enough for this time. If this won't teach them.

— How tranquil!

- And how gentle!
- Like children in a cradle.
- And how they clamored! Do you remember the terrible yelling and howling?
- How they demanded!
- (*Suppressed laughter. The calm, but forceful voice of the GIRL IN BLACK.*)
- Girl in Black.*— Mock not at the fallen.
- 'Tis she again.
- The Girl in Black.
- She grows intolerable.
- What does she want?
- Girl in Black.*— They bravely died.
- She again.
- She must be shut up in a madhouse.
- Not worth while. Let's not be cruel. She worries no one now.
- Let her talk.
- Let the dead heed her. They're much flattered to listen to her.
- (*Restrained, brisk laughter.*)
- Girl in Black.*— They bravely died.
- (*Silence. Like dark silhouettes they quietly pass on.*)
- Look out! Here's blood.
- (*Silence.*)
- Have you seen them close?
- Yes. This morning we've been here with the engineer. He's greatly pleased with the work of his projectiles.
- What silence!
- Careful, here's blood again.
- Oh, I see. When will it all be cleared away?
- Yes, 'tis expedient at once. It is dangerous to leave so many corpses.
- Will they arise, then?
- (*Quiet laughter and again the GIRL's voice.*)
- Girl in Black.*— Mock not at the fallen!
- (*Silence.*)
- She'll soon grow hoarse ever repeating the same. Say, were you on the dead field to-day, when victorious hymns were sung to the machine gun?
- Oh, yes, I was here with mamma. It was so solemn. We all wept. Who composed the prayer, do you know? So sublime!
- The abbot, I understand.
- No, that isn't true. The people in their rapture composed it.

— It was so touching, when mothers brought to the machine their little infants and made them kiss it. Tender, childish arms trustingly embracing the copper monster — how touching!

— How charming. I am a man — yet I cried.

— All cried.

— Waved handkerchiefs. Shouted.

— And flags floated!

— The sun emerged from the clouds and shone upon us.

— Only upon us.

— Yes — they remained in the shadows. The sun would not see them.

— I regret it will soon all be cleared away. The place is so convenient for evening promenades. Here it's so peaceful.

— Careful,— here's blood.

— Nothing, it is all dry. 'Tis impossible to remain in the city from the rattle and the clang of iron.

— Yes, everywhere chains are forged. Unfortunately, it is indispensable.

— But can it not be done quietly? One is actually deafened by the clatter of the hammers. It grates upon the nerves. I dreamt all night of an endless iron chain encircling the globe. I need to go somewhere.

— True, how peaceful!

(*Silence.*)

— Do you trust King-Hunger?

— Yes, he has faithfully discharged his duties.

— But he is too gloomy. The second night he already stands here and utters not a word. It is offensive.

— I hear that he is preparing a speech.

— So? That would be very nice. Do you remember his speech in the court?

— He is too gloomy.

— Will you be to-morrow at the professor's first lecture?

— How, does he lecture?

— Yes. On culture.

— I understand he is very ill, on his deathbed.

— Imagine, he recovered. Such a vigorous old man. We have all been visiting him every day, and he kissed our hands, saying, 'My dear sisters of charity.'

— Peace! I think King-Hunger wants to speak.

— That's interesting!

— Stop moving!

— He raised his hand.

— Hold! Peace!

*King-Hunger (coming out of his trance, he extends his hand toward the dead and begins quietly, restrainingly).—*What did you gain, madmen? Where did you go? What did you hope? How did you struggle? We have machine guns, we have brains, we have power,—what have you, wretched scum? Now you are reduced to the ground and gaze heavenward with glassy eyes—heaven will not answer you. The black earth will swallow you to-night, and on your graves will sprout forth fat grass, for our cattle to graze. Was that your wish, madmen?

*Triumphant Voices.—*Where did you go?

—What did you gain?

—The black earth will swallow you soon. There come the grave-diggers.

—They bring spades. Be buried, madmen!

—Woe unto the vanquished!

—Woe unto the vanquished!

(A silent group of GRAVEDIGGERS, with spades on their shoulders, appear on the scene. Quietly they stop near the border of the dead field.)

*King-Hunger (continuing).—*Why did you die—why? Here they bring spades—they approach you—haste! Bethink, awake—stir up, I conjure you. You can't? Silenced? Death has fettered your mouths? Yes, Death is a great smith and you will not break his bonds! And you I called my children, O vile, miserable scum.

(Triumphant, coldly morose exclamations.)

—Woe unto the vanquished!

*King-Hunger.—*Oh, my son, my son! You clamored so loud—why are you mute? Oh, my daughter, my daughter, you hated so profoundly, so intensely, you most miserable on earth—arise. Arise from the dust! Rend the shadowy bonds of death! Arise! I conjure you in the name of Life!—You're silent? Then be you——

(Suddenly a confused commotion rises on the dead field, a rustling, an indistinct crunching of broken bones, a persistent scratching of the earth with sharp, dead nails; and terrified, with outstretched necks, the VICTORS listen attentively. A dull, far-distant, thousand-strong murmur, as if underground, sends a reply.)

—We shall yet come.—We shall yet come.—Woe unto the victorious.

*King-Hunger.—*What do I hear?

(A distant dead murmur.)

—We shall yet come!

—We shall yet come!

—Woe unto the victorious!

(The voices die away; peace and silence reign again on the dead field, and vaguely appears the motionless silhouette of DEATH. Stupor grips all for a while. Roaring, KING-HUNGER suddenly swings himself over to the other side and menacingly shouts in ferocious rapture.)

King-Hunger.—Ha — ha! Have you heard? They shall yet come! They shall yet come! Woe unto the victorious!

(He roars. Panic, terror, and flight. Dismayed voices.)

—Hurry! Hurry!

—The dead arise!

—The dead arise!

—They run after us!

—Hurry!

—Run! Run! The dead arise!

(Elbowing, stumbling, knocking down sobbing women, they run wildly howling. His sinewy, swaying body outstretched after the fleeing, enraptured with frenzied ecstasy, KING-HUNGER shouts.)

King-Hunger.—Run! Run! The dead arise!

(Curtain)

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MAETERLINCK'S BLUEBIRD

BY EMILY S. HAMBLÉN

MAETERLINCK'S recent drama, the *Blue Bird*, has met with a popular reception, which can hardly be accounted for by the extraordinary beauty of the staging for which it calls or by the obvious interpretations to which it lends itself.

Under the facile readings of its meaning, which one hears from most of its spectators and readers, there must be some sub-conscious sense, some untranslated instinct, which apprises the people that here is a serious attempt, not merely to present the problem of life under a new aspect, but to solve it by a new doctrine.

It is, therefore, surprising to find the more learned interpretations of the drama following so closely old habits of thought and employing the old terminology.

In truth, we have here the most assured expression of a philosophy which during Maeterlinck's entire literary career has been clarifying and rationalizing itself. Under the form of a fantasy, a fairy tale, he has given us a reading of life which may submit its claim to validity to the profoundest psychology of the time. Even every minor detail of the drama stands, in the author's intention, for one of life's verities.

Let us see whether this statement can be substantiated by an interpretation which will both hang together and will oppose an impenetrable front to scientific criticism.

The protagonists of the drama are the children of a poor woodcutter and his wife; a boy Tytyl, and a girl, slightly younger, called Mytyl. The boy stands for the most strongly and sanely developed human type among modern men; the man of acute faculties, subtle senses, and illuminating intelligence. The girl is his inseparable companion, the woman of his home.

But there is another woman in the drama, almost more angel than woman; the daughter of the woodcutter's neighbor, Madame Berlingot, or the Fairy Bérylune, and this woman is still a child. Moreover, she is sick; she sleeps in the moonbeams, and has strange dreams: she suffers from a nervous disorder which only one thing can cure; she is pining for the Bluebird of Happiness, the secret of life, the soul of the world. Her

mother, the Fairy Bérylune, is moved to send the man-child out through the universe to seek the wondrous thing which shall bring her daughter health.

The fairy is Earth, the mother of the highest as well as the lowest, of the most aspiring as well as of the dullest.

But Tytyl, the adventurous child, with all his endowment has not yet acquired the power of seeing into the real nature of even commonplace things. So Bérylune presents him with a small cap in which is fixed a diamond. When this cap is on his head, by turning the diamond from right to left he will have a new power of vision.

The diamond stands for the new power of intellect with which the coming man will interrogate Nature, and is set in the already developed lobe of the brain.

The first effect of the turning of the diamond is to reveal the souls of familiar domestic things. The bread, the sugar, the water, the milk, the quartern loaves, the hours of the children's lives, shut up in the clock, the cat and the dog in the room, all become intelligible beings and begin to perform characteristic actions. The Fairy herself is transformed into a creature of beauty. The hours resolve in a mystic dance while the dull stones in the walls of the room send forth the radiant lights of jewels.

Finally, from the overturned lamp rises a dazzling, luminous figure, 'A maid of incomparable beauty.' 'It's the queen,' exclaims Tytyl, with patriotic interpretation. 'It's the Blessed Virgin,' Mytyl declares, with religious personification. 'No, my children,' says Fairy Earth, 'it is Light!'

The diamond is turned back by Tytyl so suddenly that Light, the Cat, the Dog, Fire, Water, Bread, Sugar, and Milk are unable to return to their former state, and the Fairy, now in dull garb again, tells them that they may go out with the children in their quest for the Bluebird.

All the seekers for the Bluebird are enrobed for the journey by the Fairy in her own palace. Each chooses a characteristic garb.

Bread arrays himself in the rich robes of a Turkish pasha, and has an enormous stomach. He is bombastic, futile, and cowardly. It is he who objects to Light coming among them unarrayed,—truth shedding her rays directly. To Bread, later, is entrusted the cage in which the Bluebird when found is to be confined.

Bread obviously symbolizes substantial good and material wellbeing. He accompanies the children to the Land of Memory and to the Palace of Night, but does not go with them either into the Forest, the realm of primitive things, nor into the Kingdom of the Future. Each bluebird that is found is entrusted to his care, but changes its hue after he has taken it into

custody,—the inevitable effect of an attempt to translate spiritual acquisition into material wealth. Yet the service of Bread is real, for he gives the children food cut from his body, to sustain them upon their journey.

Sugar is a blue and white figure. His form is that of a eunuch. He is the spirit of compromise and convention; the emasculated instinct which seeks comfort and pleasure and has no strength for achievement. He is Mytyl's friend. She continually seeks his company and bears him on her mind. Even in the Land of Memory she tells her lost brothers and sisters of Sugar's attractions. Tytyl pays little attention to him, though he accepts one of his fingers when it is offered along with the bread.

Fire and Water are antagonistic principles, and Fire has a particular antipathy to Bread. Both have seriously encroached upon his realm. Fire and Water are willing servants of man, but are opposed to a still greater understanding of their natures on his part from fear of losing their identity. Light has told the Animals the Things and the Elements, that on the day the children find the Bluebird they will lose their lives.

The Cat is master of the intrigue against man. He is the embodiment of cunning and guile. He stands for the spirit which is traitorous to its own knowledge. Under a friendly pretense of preparing a reception for the children, he precedes them into the realm of Night and into the Forest, and plots with the guardians of each place for the destruction of the emissaries of Man. Mytyl is his friend and protector, as she is the friend of Sugar. Tytyl worsts the Cat's base efforts, chiefly by ignoring them and by valiently overriding the obstacles that are put in his way.

There is one exception, one scene in which the positions of the two children, the man, and the woman, are reversed. That is in the Forest, the land of elemental things, where the mind of man has yet made no conquests and where instinct alone is his guide. In this realm Mytyl understands the treachery which is plotting for the destruction of her brother and herself, and understands also the quality which shall save them,—intelligent fidelity in the guise of the Dog.

Tytyl's new intelligence, for he enters the Forest with the diamond still on the left side of his head, is sufficient to show him that the trees and undomesticated animals are intelligible beings, but he cannot comprehend their speech. He appeals to the Cat to interpret it for him, and, of course, is misled. Under this instigation the inhabitants of the forest, though in a skulking and bullying manner, set upon the two children, and they are saved only by the Dog who, hearing their cries, bursts the cords with which Tytyl had ordered him to be bound after himself beating him, and rushes to their defense.

But even with the Dog's strength on their side, the children would

eventually have been destroyed had not Light come to their relief. She bids Tytyl turn back his diamond, and when he has obeyed instantly trees and animals assume their accustomed places and become dumb. After the transformation Tytyl stands in his old relation with the Dog and Mytyl in hers with the Cat.

The Forest yielded no bluebird to the children — this unaspiring, dreamless tract of primitive impulse — but the dawn rises above it at the approach of Light.

But before reaching the Forest the children had visited the Land of Memory and the Palace of Night.

In the Land of Memory are the grandparents and the dead brothers and sisters. Tytyl and Mytyl find them just as they remembered them in life, only fairer. All the lost friends had slept in unconsciousness and inactivity for many months, waiting for thoughts of the living to rouse them from their trance. Yet they do not understand what is meant by Death, and time does not exist for them. When they awake they take up the pursuits of their life upon Earth.

There is in the suggestion of this scene almost a grewsome reminder of the pathological condition of plural personality. The accounts of minds so disintegrated tell us of two or more different personalities in the same individual assuming different names and manifesting different characteristics, and of each personality attempting to get control of the patient's faculties. Is this the manner in which the departed live on, as an element in a higher, more complex life, but self-conscious only when the mind of the new individual is directed to them?

The question is not farfetched. Maeterlinck is teaching no belief in a world of shades; neither is he talking about mere influences which survive after their source has been removed. The 'Enigma of Annihilation' has been the burden of his philosophy since its first utterance in the beginning, almost its obsession. If Death, then, has been the last enemy he has destroyed, he has achieved this victory by no less complete a method than by making Death an integral part of Life. And this not in the sense of a passage of the soul from our world into another, but in the sense of the dead being a component part of the life of the world, only a part not yet revealed to consciousness, not comprehended by mind.

When, just before their return to their own home, the children visit the graveyard of the world, the resting place of the unknown departed who cannot live in their personal memories, the spirits leave their graves at midnight and become glistening lilies and the songs of birds. Mytyl, looking at them in frightened wonder, asks, 'Where are the dead?' And Tytyl answers, 'There are no dead!'

What is the secret of the midnight transformation? Is the time of midnight chosen because it is the traditional hour for the emergence of spirits from their tombs?

I believe that here we have reference to a physiological fact as truly as we have in the turning of the diamond to the left side of the head. For the mystery of sleep has not yet been solved. The meaning of its unfamiliar voices, and of the elusive poetry of its fleeting moments, has never yet had scientific explanation. But that the phenomena of sleep foreshadow to us an amplitude of being of which we barely as yet touch the first rim, Maeterlinck unquestionably teaches. Does the doctrine seem to carry an unpleasant suggestion of the physical? But if substance has no existence, as science now is more than darkly hinting, and body is but the limitation of consciousness, the measure of the individual's intelligible power, does not the earthy flavor of the symbol vanish?

The Kingdom of Night is the mental world of man from mind's beginning up to the present time, the realm of darkness as to the real nature of things, yet of conquest over many forces inimical to man's wellbeing. Its guardian spirit is an ancient woman. She is fearful regarding the loss, not only of her sovereignty, but of her identity when man shall search her 'caves of thought' for the supreme human ideal of triumphant self-knowledge — the Dream of dreams. For back of the cavernous abode, where dwell in confinement and under repression the evil passions of men and the ghosts of himself as he has advanced through the lower stages of being, is a counterpart ethereal realm of human aspirations and dreams — the garden of the Spirit.

Among the myriad bluebirds of the 'dream-garden,' — 'unreal, infinite and ineffable, bathed in nocturnal light,' illumined by 'stars and planets — which 'fly ceaselessly from jewel to jewel and from moonbeam to moonbeam,' hovering 'perpetually and harmoniously down to the confines of the horizon, innumerable to the point of appearing to be the breath, the azure atmosphere, the very substance of the wonderful garden,' flies the true Bluebird of the children's quest. But they do not know it and fill their hands with those which can easily be caught. Mytyl and even the Dog catch many. Bread and Sugar take none.

But the children cannot hold their birds while they remain in this azure realm. They are afraid of being taken up to the sky with them. They will rather carry the birds out to their own country. And Light is waiting for them.

But the birds droop and die and the boy is convulsed with grief. 'Do not cry, my child,' says Light. 'You did not catch the one that is able to live in broad daylight. He has gone elsewhere. We shall find him again.'

‘Haven’t they got him?’ asked Night of the Cat, as she saw the children departing with the birds they had taken. ‘No,’ replied the knowing one; ‘I see him there on that moonbeam. They could not reach him. He kept too high.’

Light accompanies the children to the Kingdom of the Future. This is as blue as the Garden of Dreams. But its denizens are not birds, they are human spirits waiting to go to their work in the world of men. Each spirit knows the place and the hour of his birth, the time when men will be ready to receive him. Some will carry ills and crimes to the world, but most will take beneficent gifts. All the inventions, the discoveries, and the insights which in the future are to enlarge the bounds of time and of space are preparing in this nether world. Among the bringers are the King of the Three Planets, Earth, Mars, and the Moon, and the groping child, who will destroy the power of death. He will become blind, the child-guide explains to Tytyl. Which means, no doubt, that the objective world is fast passing out of ocular into spirit view.

Life is the lawgiver of the kingdom of the Future, but her behests are carried out by Time. It is Time who calls the spirits when their hour has come, and forces them into existence whether they will or not. He also keeps back those trying to anticipate their true natal hour. Two of the spirits united in the blue realm will not walk on earth at the same time. They part in utter despair as one is taken and the other left. I shall be ‘the saddest thing on earth,’ says the one who must stay behind. ‘It would be better to hope,’ is the suggestion of even grim Time, and the joy of Earth breaks forth in a magnificat of the mothers as the children are borne off on the river of life.

There are gigantic mystic figures in the Azure Palace, ‘paler and more diaphanous’ than the blue children, figures of a ‘sovereign and silent beauty.’ They are of the race which shall succeed man upon the earth.

When the children, their companions, and Light met under the walls of the paternal home to consider the results of their quest, Tytyl is forced to admit that he has not brought back the Bluebird to the Fairy. ‘The one of the Land of Memory turned quite black, the one of the Future turned quite pink, the Night’s are dead, and I could not catch the one in the Forest. Is it my fault if they change color or die or escape? Will the Fairy be angry, and what will she say?’

‘We have done what we could,’ Light answers. ‘It seems likely that the Bluebird does not exist, or that he changes color when he is caged.’

The cage is called for and Bread returns it, ‘untouched and carefully closed,’ as he received it. Spirit has not yet penetrated matter.

The parting between the children and their companions is a sad one.

The latter must go back to the Land of the Silence of Things. The lost communion with man is most tragic for the Dog, the subhuman being whose aspirations are most directed toward man. Yet the silence will never again be so deep and unfathomable as before.

When Tytyl and Mytyl wake in their cots the next morning they wake to a world which has new meaning and new beauty. The change is alarming to their substantial, world-adapted parents, and the mother can see in it only evidences of an illness which will deprive her of her last two children. The father is more obtuse, and does not sense the danger of a separation.

Fairy Earth, in the guise of Neighbor Berlingot, comes in to see whether the Bluebird has been secured for her sick little girl. Tytyl suddenly discovers that his own turtle dove is blue. It is hanging in a cage in the same room in which a year before he had stood looking out on a wealth and beauty which lay outside of himself and his own home; the place in which he had dreamed his dream.

He gives the bird to the neighbor, who takes it and quickly returns with her little girl. 'Can she walk?' asks Tytyl's mother. 'Can she walk?' repeats the Fairy; 'she can run, she can dance, she can fly.'

Tytyl regards the angelic child with wonderment, 'Oh, how like Light she is!' he exclaims. Before her coming he had said, 'I like Light best of all.'

Tytyl, on his mother's demand, kisses the little girl rather shyly, and they stand holding the dove between them. 'I have seen bluer ones,' says Tytyl, 'but those which are quite blue, you know, do what you will, you can't catch them.' But the woman is content. 'He's lovely,' she says.

Between them they lose the Bluebird and the little girl cries out in despair. 'Never mind,' is Tytyl's comfort. 'Don't cry. I will catch him again.'

Is Maeterlinck only a mystic weaving cobweb dreams, or has he in truth the vision of a new earth which will be a realized world to some unbound faculty of man? And suppose his seership be allowed; does there linger in it any trace of dogma, that is, belief prompted by desire rather than that which is a translation of experience?

The suspicion is aroused chiefly by the promise of perfect happiness and pure joy for the world in the future. This hints at the irrationality of a static state. True self-knowledge may be the genuine happiness, but it is far from being the banishment of pain.

But if this apparently false note be barred and this shadowy guardian of the Kingdom of the Future be ignored, all else in the drama is of the process of evolution and is legitimate matter for conception. That the objective world is but the sum total of man's consciousness, the interpretation

to himself of his own sensations and passions as he comes up in the scale of being from protoplasm to the plane of human intellect, is the doctrine not only of the mystic, Maeterlinck, but of the greatest biologist of any time, the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. If Nietzsche is the safer guide for modern feet it is not because the *a priori* of his doctrine is more material than that of Maeterlinck, but because he has the scientist's stricter insistence upon process and its slowly working law of cause and effect. Yet it would seem, as one notes the rationalizing process which has been going on in the mind of Maeterlinck, as though he had accepted the essential principles of Nietzsche's philosophy. It is quite certain that in the Bluebird he promises nothing for the future of the human race except what may come in the course of physiological development. When the ethereal Little Girl asks Tytyl what and how the Bluebird eats, he assures her that the dove eats with his beak and that any common substance will suffice for his food, 'corn, bread, Indian corn, grasshoppers, etc.'

But Maeterlinck's message is addressed to the spirit, and its symbolic form will render it the most effective stimulus to many minds.

Finally, it may be noted that still another writer of our time has sought to give us the same message which Nietzsche and Maeterlinck have delivered. It is the poet, George Meredith. The psychology of his fiction becomes in his verse a philosophy of 'the significance of earth'; earth the nourishing mother of man's spirit as well as of his body; the one source of his strength; the projector of his spirit into ethereal realms; the subject of his being which must become the object of his knowledge and his love if he is to rise to loftier heights. Read these verses of Meredith's great poem, *Earth and Man*:

'If he aloft for aid
Imploring storms, her essence is the spur.
His cry to heaven is a cry to her
He would evade.

'Not elsewhere can he tend.
Those are her rules which bid him wash foul sins;
Those her revulsions from the skull that grins
To ape his end.

'And her desires are those
For happiness, for lastingness, for light.
'Tis she who kindles in his haunting night
The hoped dawn-rose.

'Fair fountains of the dark
Daily she waves him, that his inner dream
May clasp amid the glooms a springing beam,
A quivering lark;

'This life and her to know
For Spirit; with awakenedness of glee
To feel stern joy her origin; not he
The child of woe.

'But that the senses still
Usurp the station of their issue mind,
He would have burst the chrysalis of the blind;
As yet he will;

'Then shall the horrid pall
Be lifted, and a spirit nigh divine,
"Live in thy offspring as I live in mine,"
Will hear her call.'

THE GATE OF WISHES

BY MARY MACMILLAN

Persons. The Man, the Girl, and the Little Folk.

Time. The afternoon of Hallowe'en.

Place. The top of a hill where there is a scattered clump of tall old pine trees, and in the background a thicker growth of sturdy beeches. The hill, sloping down in front, has been partly cleared away generations ago and now gives a view across and up and down a broad cultivated valley; on the opposite hill are the great houses of rich estates; far to the south the valley shades into a big smoky city. A girl and man appear walking slowly and talking.

He.—This day is truly like ‘apples of gold in pitchers of silver.’ Well, a man has a right to his portion of joy, and I regard loafing in the afternoon as perfectly legitimate. Oh, I have Biblical sanction for it — ‘and the evening and the morning were the first day’; there is no mention made of the afternoon and without doubt work was suspended then.

She.—Of course you know who is said to be able to cite scripture for his own evil purposes! Which remark doesn’t sound very polite from a person who ought to be grateful. I wanted to come awfully. (*She sits down on a log.*)

He.—And I believe I knew you did all the while. Yet I spent the morning trying to resist the temptation of telephoning you, and then, when I finally rang you up, I was crazy for fear I would be too late and you’d have something else on hand.

She.—Why do you say temptation? Are you running off from something.

He (sitting down on the further end of the log).—No, I am running off to something. (*He smiles at her.*)

She (looking back among the bushes).—Are the trees so dangerous?

He.—Not for me — I was thinking of you.

She.—They have never hurt me.

He.—Bless their hearts, of course not. But I was only thinking that it was a little impertinent to ask you to come out here. If it had been the matinee — but I was too selfish to sacrifice myself to four-walled propriety on a golden afternoon like this. A walk in the woods is not considered a great treat by most people and is a little unconventional, isn’t it? You see I don’t know you very well.

She.— Don't you?

He.— Do I?

She.— Don't you?

He.— *Do I?* That is the question that has been puzzling me ever since I met you. There are people you see always and never know, and there are people you see once and have known always. It is a feeling on the border of mystery. Have I known you in a previous existence or am I really jumping to an end I have the right to gain only through the sedate and polite process of acquaintance? Or do I know you through that blessed something — call it intuitive sympathy? Or is it all a mistake. Maybe I am just the victim of my own stupid conceit and don't understand you any better than the dozens of other girls I meet.

She.— Don't you understand them?

He.— I'm afraid I don't bother to. But about you. Am I right in feeling I know you? One can be foolish enough to make humiliating mistakes, you know.

She.— But you are not that. And — *I* had the same curious impression in regard to *you*.

He.— And of course you are not that sort. (*They both laugh. His voice becomes exultingly firm as he says*), I am going to trust to the feeling about it then. Let's make a fire. (*He rises and begins to look about for sticks.*) Can't we put convention aside—make the old gossip stand on her head in a corner, so? (*He illustrates with a stick.*) And begin as if we were old friends?

She.— I thought we had begun that way. Didn't I stand on the back platform with you coming out?

He.— But that might have been because you liked my company better than that of the fat women with their baskets inside the car. I was flattered by your preference.

She.— Being unconventional with a person is a preference. I have a much older acquaintance with those market women than I have with you. (*She gets up and helps him gather sticks.*) Did you ever notice their faces particularly? Time seems to have baked them to a brown stolidity, and the least effort toward expression would crack them. You wonder if the baked clay exterior hides any emotion.

He.— Oh, a brown Chinese sort, perhaps. Yet I wonder if it is not an older and milder and more civilized sensation than *we* ever have. But who are we to judge? You and I? Why we are half savages, vagabonds, gypsies — at least I am and I hoped you were. You see I am becoming more boldly aggressive, pretending to a knowledge of you I have no right to possess, much less to *own*. (*She smiles at the pun.*) But you *are* a gypsy, aren't you? Please say you are.

She (sits down on a log. He goes on gathering sticks, breaking them up, heaping them and building the fire while she talks.) I suppose I shouldn't care for these woods if I weren't, and I do care for them awfully. I know all the valleys and hills round here as one knows the corners of a house one has lived in always. I don't mind confessing to you because you are going to be as foolish about them as I am.

He (smiling).— I shouldn't wonder.

She.— This never moving flock of pine trees here on this hill crest is my lode-star; I can see it from any point for miles over the other hills across the valley. This hill is high, you know, and the pines, taller and darker and in winter fatter than the other trees, are an easily detected landmark. Do you like my view?

He.— I had an intuition of it when we came through the gate into the woods from the traveled road. (*Regarding it critically.*) Yes, (*slowly*) it's adequate. It seems to contain everything — a compact, well-regulated little view with small corpulent market gardens in the foreground and in the background stately hills with several castles atop, and down the valley at one end the old gray city, and up the valley at the other end the dear farm country — all not too far to suggest stray fancies.

She.— I knew you would notice the castles.

He.— Of course, for in one of them, in the top of that tallest tower there is a princess and she is looking over in this direction.

She.— An ogre has her imprisoned?

He.— Just, and our fire will be a beacon light for her. Then she will know she still has friends in the world, and the crickets will sing her a cheerfuller song when the dusk comes up through the grass and gathers in the trees and bushes.

She.— We might send her a message by a robin.

He (Starting with a quick look at her).— Never! Never! He must be reserved as a little messenger only between you and me. He is too nice to be carelessly employed.

She.— He *is* nice — I might have known he would be a little friend of yours. All of life seems nice to-day.

He (sitting down by her).— Oh, unusually! (*After a pause.*) On this sort of yellow day life runs around crying 'come and eat me,' like your little roast pigs in the story you told me.

She.— Yellow is so soft and gracious, yet the dictionary merely says that it is one of the primitive or prismatic colors, and that united with blue it yields green, and with red it produces orange.

He.— I should say that yellow maple leaves united with blue sky yield joy, and with red oak leaves produce delight. A full-leaved glorious

maple tree above me on a warm October day seems a still, exquisite, suspended altar from which is lowered an incense of joyous peace as I walk beneath looking up into its heavenly sufficiency.

She.— Have you noticed how towards dusk when everything else is darkening, these fair maples seem to catch the light and hold it? Spirits of little children must poise among the branches — they are out earlier at night than the older ghosts, you know, because they have to go to bed earlier, being so young.

He.— Did you ever see a ghost?

She.— No, but I haven't given up hope.

He.— Then you probably will. But you — I dare not use the words I'd like, I wonder if I'll ever dare? *You* ought to see all sorts of beautiful and curious little folk.

She.— These woods are full of them, you know. (*Smiling, she takes a stick and draws a fairy circle.*) But to see them you have to be very happy and to come at the time they like best — which nobody knows. It isn't that they are shy, but they are very discriminating and haughty. Still, I'm trusting to see them for I'm very respectful toward them, and I want to so much.

He.— And people usually get what they want very much.

She.— Do you believe that?

He.— Very surely, but they don't always know what they desire, and they aren't always conscious of the thing that comes. The gate of wishes has an intricate fastening whose secret many people cannot win through, and those who at last find themselves on the other side, sometimes look with strange eyes upon unexpected country; some of them see it with the eyes of the body and some with the eyes of the mind, and some only with the eyes of the soul. (*After a pause.*) There is something I want awfully, but in myself I lose faith. Do you suppose I ever shall have it?

She.— Do you like it well enough?

He.— Yes, I like *her* well enough.

She (*starting and staring at some trees off at the side*).— Oh, did you see anything then?

He.— I thought I did, but in these autumn woods

When big oak leaves come softly sailing down

And birds still loiter for the warm gold days

And rabbits wildly skurry out of sight

And hallowe'en is drawing on apace

And a dear witch sits by you on a log,

All sorts of things may happen to your eyes.

She.— Oh, hear the rustle of those poplar leaves! It is the first of

all the dull brown sounds; for the sounds in spring are gentle and when the breezes stir the leaves they yield a music like the color blue, but in the fall the sound grows stiff and like the color brown. Their leaves will cling to those wee oak trees till the spring is here, and then forlorn, in a new world, their own life overpast, they'll flutter in a passion of despair and, wailing, seem like the unhappy spirits of unburied men. (*After a pause.*) Surely something stirred around and in that ghostly blossom of the golden rod.

He.— A little hungry bluebird hunting seeds
 Maybe it was. I like the golden rod
 Fantastic, pale, and mystical as now
 Better than when it flaunts its hardier hue.

She.— These slender stalks will last the winter out,
 And on this hillside cold and lone and drear
 The winds will bend and beat them all night through.

He (looking wistfully at her).—
 But now the air is warm and they content
 As I am in the radiance I love.

She.— The romance of the year seems gathered up
 And strewn before our feet these autumn days.
 No one can miss it.

He.— Even the dullest soul
 Must stumble on it. It is everywhere:
 It's in the air in color, scent, and sound.
 I smell it in the wood-smoke even now
 — That tenuous spirit of the old strong hills —
 And hear it from those birds all winging south
 From lands of dark green pine and dark blue lake.

She.— I heard a sound ——

He.— From that low hawthorn bush.

Voice (singing).
 When the night wind carries the tang of the woods
 — Out on the hillside longing to be
 Where the elves do peer from their flower-leaf hoods —
 Who will go hunting, go hunting with me?

(*They stare at each other, then he starts to his feet and takes a step in the direction of the voice.*)

She.— Oh, please don't move — you'll frighten them away.

Another voice (singing).
 When the wild winds blow on darksome nights
 — Up in the boughs of the gnarled apple tree

Where the gnomes are smoking their little clay pipes —
Who will go climbing, go climbing with me?

(He sits down again beside her.)

She.—Isn't it kind of them to come so near?

The rare good little folk we've longed to see.

He.—But we don't see them yet — what did you say?

That we must bear the blessing of pure joy

And be in the right place at the right time —

The place and time the little folk love best.

The stipulation's difficult and yet

'Tis so with everything of dearest worth.

She (absently).

One sees the things his own heart holds most dear.

He.—That wraithlike labyrinth of ancient weeds

Is nice enough to hold a dozen elves.

And in among those thistles tall and fierce

Lithe little brownies slip with purpose dire,

For they, the scamps, use thistles craftily

To comb the black cat's back and make sparks fly.

She.—Up in the top of that dead oak whose limbs

Are like the knuckles of a lame old man,

There lives a serious owl and naughty sprites

Tease him all day what time he tries to sleep.

Another voice (singing).

When the moon rides high mid warlock clouds

— Up in the air so far and free

Where the witches are weaving filmy shrouds —

Who will go sailing, go sailing with me?

He.—They're coming nearer, do you see them yet?

She.—No, but I feel their presence very close.

Perhaps it is not yet the witching time.

He.—We're happy, aren't we? At least I am.

To be with you is happiness enough

To fill these woods with spirits of delight.

(He looks about into the woods and towards the west.)

This is the blessed twilight of the year

And now the silent twilight of the day,

The drop distilled from all time's loveliness,

When in the west the sky grows broad and fair

With flaming topaz light that gently melts

Into a liquid turquoise up above.

The robin sings his wistful twilight song,
 Then wee small gossip crickets will fill in
 The time, till comes the wee small haunting owl.

She.—You love these little things? The flight of crows,
 The crickets —

He.— They are very dear to me
 In the big woodland world I love so well
 Only less dear than are the russet spots
 Within the woodland greenness of your eyes.

(He leans toward her and looks deep into her eyes.)

She.— Please tell me what you see?

He.— A mystery.

I look through beauty — never see the end
 And with my heavenly longing am content.

(He draws closer, taking her into his arms. She seems to see something in one of the hawthorn bushes and whispers to him. They smile and nod to each other and watch eagerly.)

She (softly). We're very happy at their holy time.

Another voice (singing).

When the wind's wild spirit lures to roam
 Out on the country roads are we
 Where all vagabonds are at home —
 Who will go roving, go roving with me?

(Voice dies away in the distance.)

He.— We'll come, sweet vagabonds,

She.— We'll come, we'll come.

The moon is climbing o'er the castle's tower,

He.— She's hastening to catch the message, dear,

The rosy kiss the sun has left for her.

And, see, she is attended by a page,

A little star who keeps close after her.

Another voice (in the distance).

In the chalice of a flower
 Do I sleep the long day through,
 'In the amber twilight hour
 Do I come to you, my dear,
 Do I come to you.

He.— In twilight glow we linger till
 Our fire falls in, still burning slow
 Upon the wooded ridge of hill
 In twilight glow.

Deep down a stream seems scarce to flow,
Our far-flown fancies have their will,
The brown glen swims with mist below.

The tawny, saffron beech leaves fill
A background 'gainst which softly blow
Your tawny locks the ruddier still
In twilight glow.

(As he speaks he rises, taking her by the hand; she rises, too, and they wander off in the direction of the little folk. A voice is heard farther away, singing.)

Voice.— Who will go roving, go roving with me?

(Another voice in another direction, singing softly.)

Voice.— Do I come to you, my dear,
Do I come to you.

